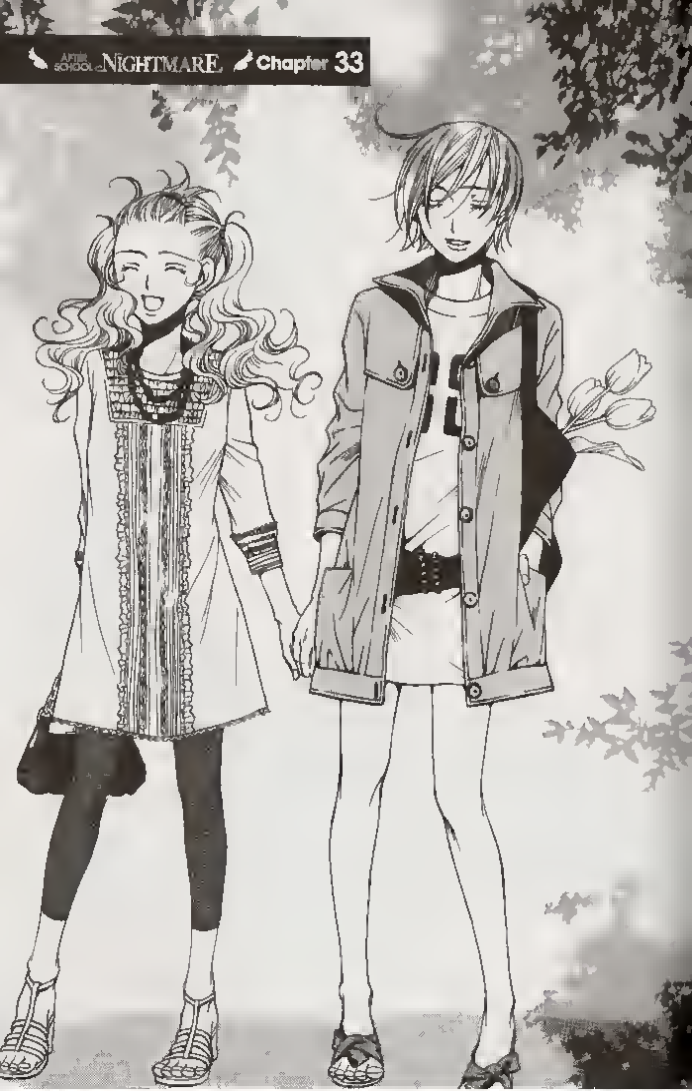

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AFTER SCHOOL NIGHTMARE

Our Story So Far

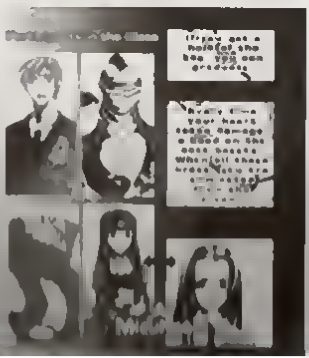
High schooler Mashiro Ichijo hides the secret that his body is half-girl and half-boy. One day he's called down to the underground infirmary and, in order to graduate from school, made to participate in an "after school class." He learns from Kureha that this "class" takes place in a dream where each student takes on their true form, different from the ones in reality, to clear their task. Hearing this, Mashiro becomes determined to become a complete male through these classes.

But the mysterious knight exposes his secret.

Who is the real student behind the knight? As he realizes it has to be another student, Mashiro is suddenly kissed by one he doesn't get along with, named Soul. For some reason, Sou thinks Mashiro's a girl and confesses his love for him. Could Sou, knowing the secret to his body, be part of the dream class?

Entranced by Sou, Mashiro blurts out that he loves Sou. But Sou tells him that he's just using Mashiro to sever his twisted ties from his sister Ai.

In shock, Mashiro seeks advice from Kurosaki-sempai (but Kurosaki — who is usually so cool and calm — suddenly tells Mashiro that he hates him. How can that be?



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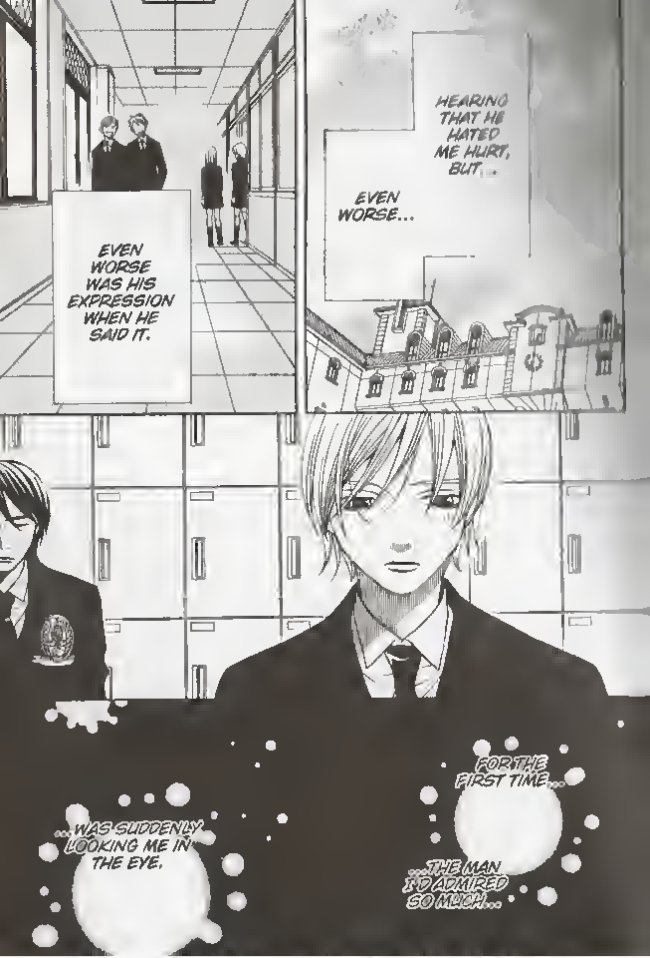
EVEN WORSE WAS HIS EXPRESSION WHEN HE SAID IT.
HEARING THAT HE HATED ME HURT, BUT...
EVEN WORSE...
...WAS SUDDENLY LOOKING ME IN THE EYE.
...THE MAN I'D ADMIRED SO MUCH...
FOR THE FIRST TIME...

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IT HURT SO MUCH...
I FELT MY HEART CONSTRICTING.
SUDDENLY, IT WAS LIKE HE'D FALLEN TO MY LEVEL.
...TO SEE THAT SIDE OF HIM.
I NEVER WANTED...

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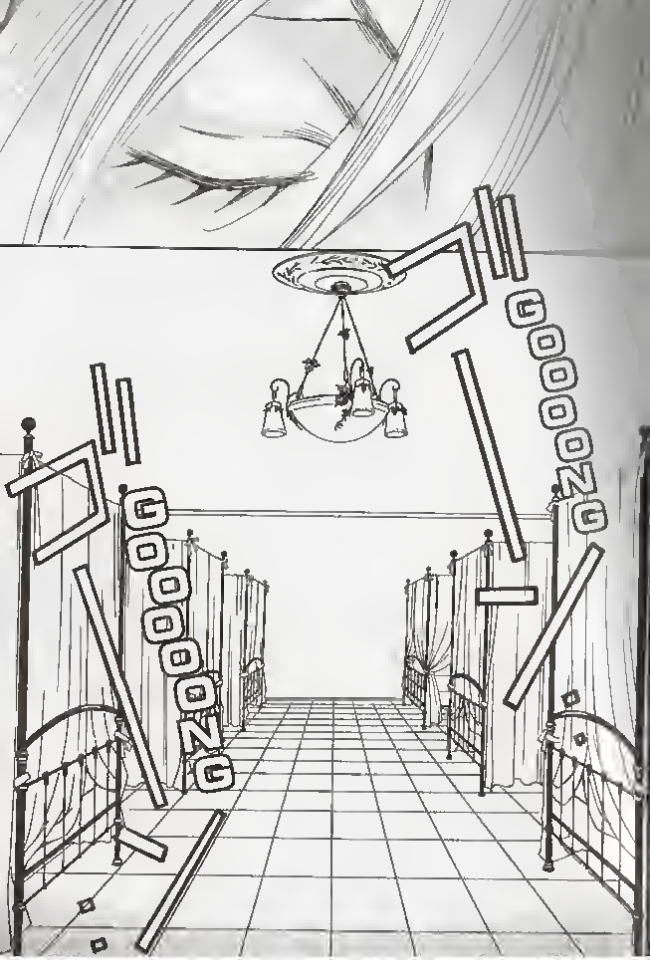

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DID YOU KNOW KUROSAKI FROM JUNIOR CLASS A IS ACTUALLY THE SON OF THE TEIOH GROUP PRESIDENT?
AND GET THIS! HE'S ALREADY ENGAGED TO SOME BIG-TIME CELEBRITY'S DAUGHTER!
SWING

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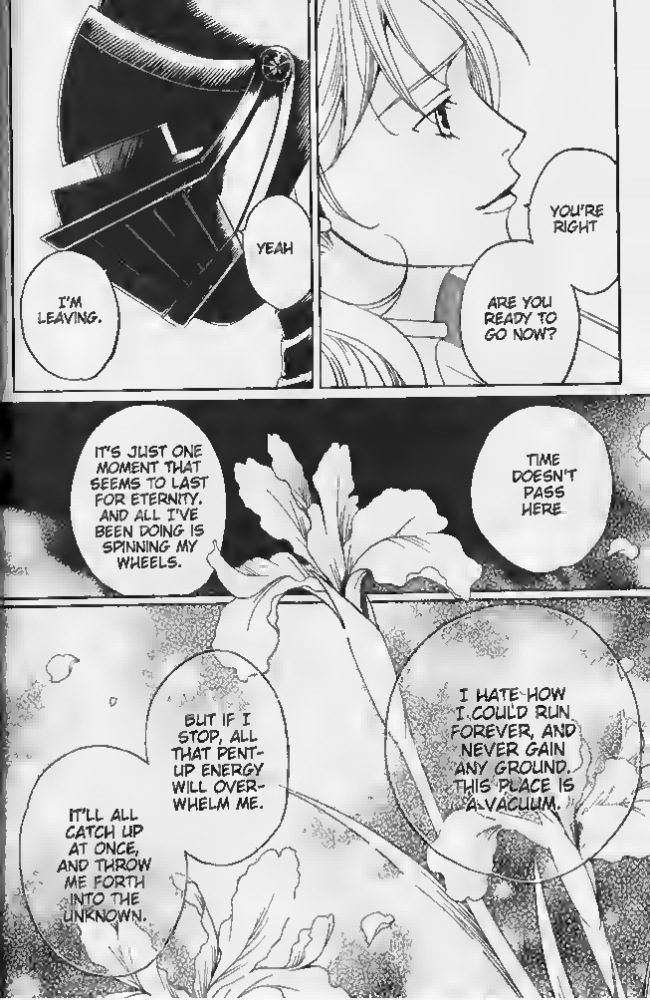
I'M LEAVING.
YEAH
ARE YOU READY TO GO NOW?
YOU'RE RIGHT
TIME DOESN'T PASS HERE.
IT'S JUST ONE MOMENT THAT SEEMS TO LAST FOR ETERNITY. AND ALL I'VE BEEN DOING IS SPINNING MY WHEELS.
I HATE HOW I COULD RUN FOREVER, AND NEVER GAIN ANY GROUND. THIS PLACE IS A VACUUM.
BUT IF I STOP, ALL THAT PENT-UP ENERGY WILL OVER-WHELM ME.
IT'LL ALL CATCH UP AT ONCE, AND THROW ME FORTH INTO THE UNKNOWN.

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THIS IS GOODBYE.
BUT NOW I'M TIRED OF WASTING ALL THIS TIME.
I KEPT RESISTING WHAT I KNEW I HAD TO ACCEPT.
...IT FEELS LIKE YOU AND I WERE GOOD FRIENDS.
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT...

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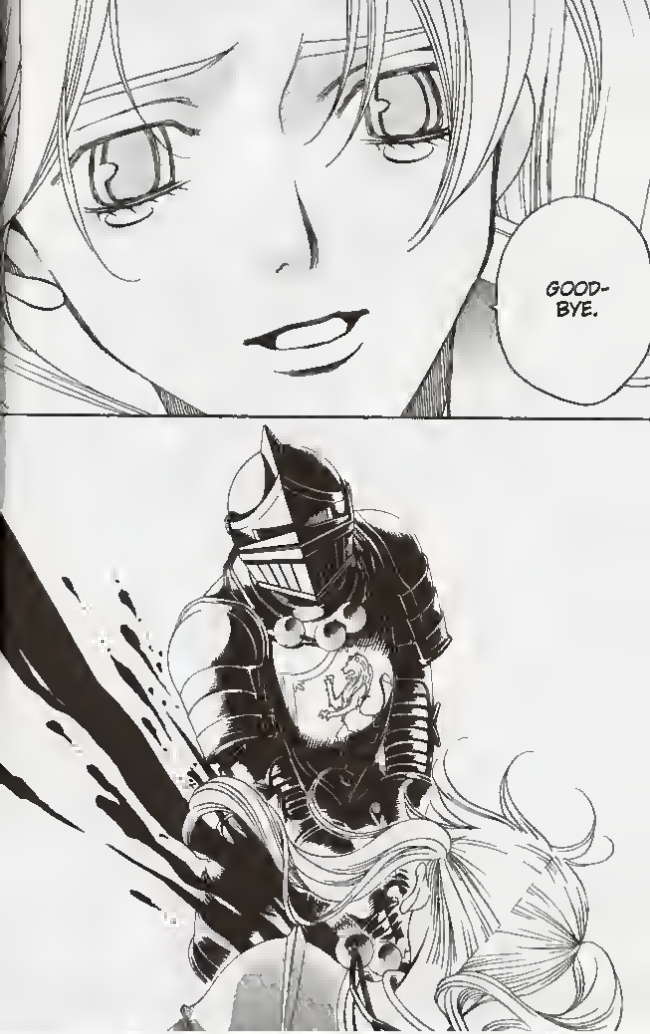

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IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE SEEN HER.
HAS SHE BEEN SKIPPING CLASS?
THAT GIRL...
THAT WITCH WHERE IS SHE?
BUT SOON I REALIZED...
I WAS FREE HERE.
HERE, I WAS SAFE FROM THE CRUSHING REALITY THAT THREATENED TO SWEEP ME AWAY.
WHEN I FIRST ATTENDED THIS CLASS, I WAS LIKE A FROZEN DOLL.
THAT LITTLE GIRL WOULD PLAY WITH ME LIKE A CAT WITH A MOUSE.
I DECIDED TO PLAY A LITTLE GAME. I WOULD ONLY LET MYSELF GRADUATE IF I COULD KILL THAT WITCH, EVEN IF ONLY ONCE.
THE FREEDOM TO ACT AS I PLEASED, WITHOUT CARE OR THOUGHT OF CONSEQUENCE, WAS SUCH A RELIEF.
BUT NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRIED, MY SWORD SLICED ONLY AIR. I RATHER LIKED IT THAT WAY, FOR IT ALLOWED THE GAME TO CONTINUE.

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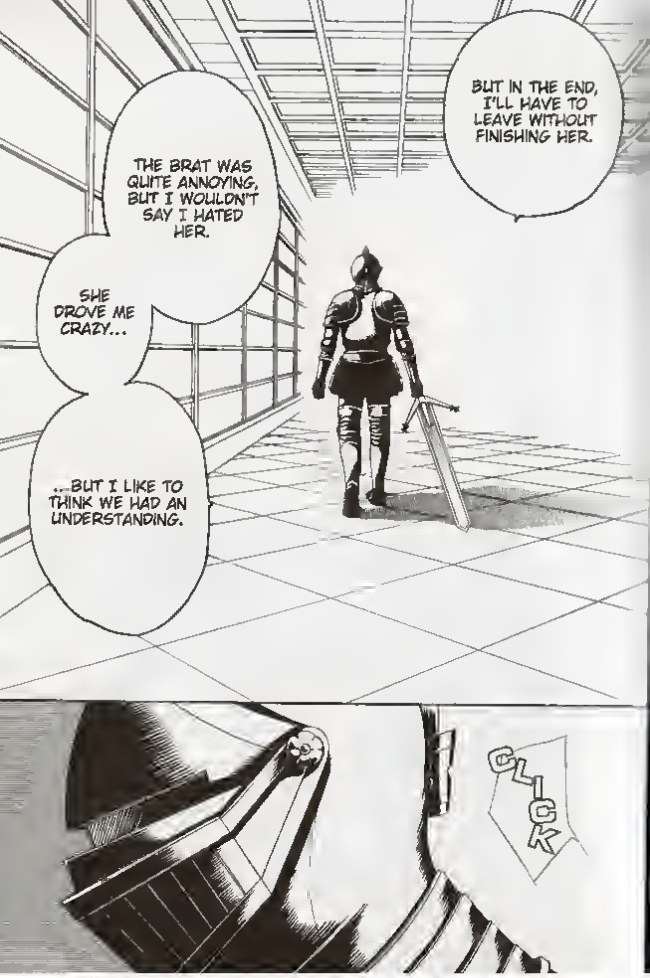
THE BRAT WAS QUITE ANNOYING, BUT I WOULDN'T SAY I HATED HER.
BUT IN THE END, I'LL HAVE TO LEAVE WITHOUT FINISHING HER.
SHE DROVE ME CRAZY...
...BUT I LIKE TO THINK WE HAD AN UNDERSTANDING.
CLICK

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WHEN YOU ASKED IF I'D EVER BEEN USED BY SOMEONE I LIKED
OH, YEAH
LET ME ANSWER THAT QUESTION OF YOURS
IN FACT LATELY IT FEELS LIKE THAT'S ALL ANYONE DOES WITH ME
YES I HAVE EVERY DAY OF MY LIFE, FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER
I'M SICK OF IT
YET, A SMALL PART OF ME BELIEVED IT BETTER TO BE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THAN TO BE SOMEONE NO ONE THOUGHT IMPORTANT AT ALL.
AND WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS?

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AS LONG AS IT MADE MY MOM HAPPY.
AS LONG AS IT PLEASED MY FATHER.
AS LONG AS IT MADE HAIJIMA'S LIFE EASIER, I WAS FINE WITH IT!!
56
BING

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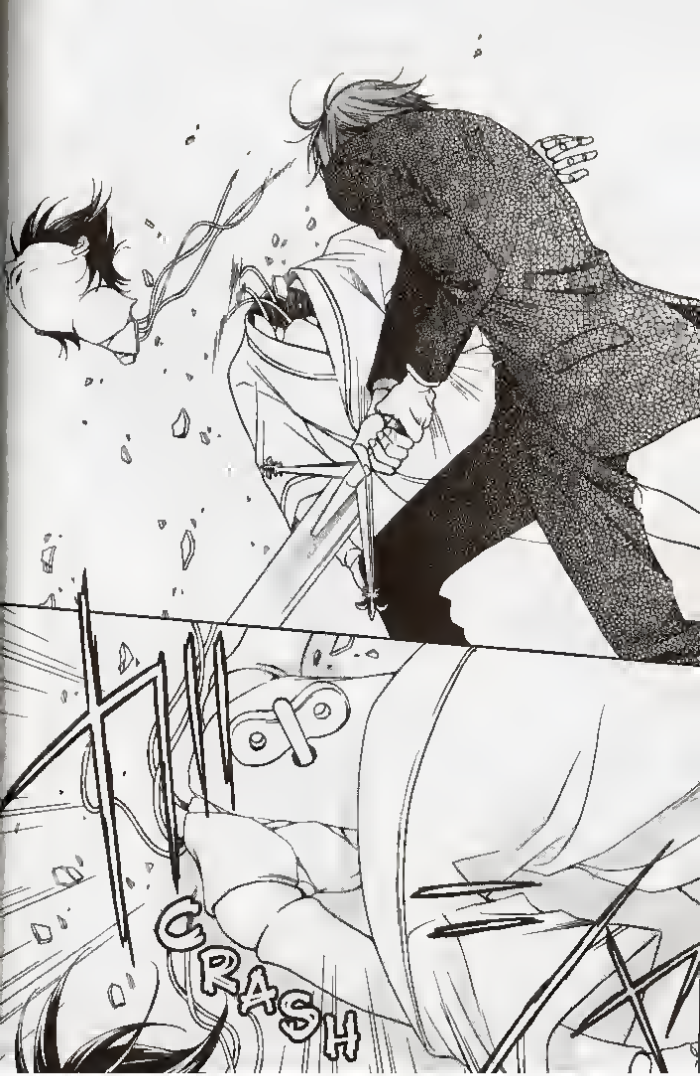

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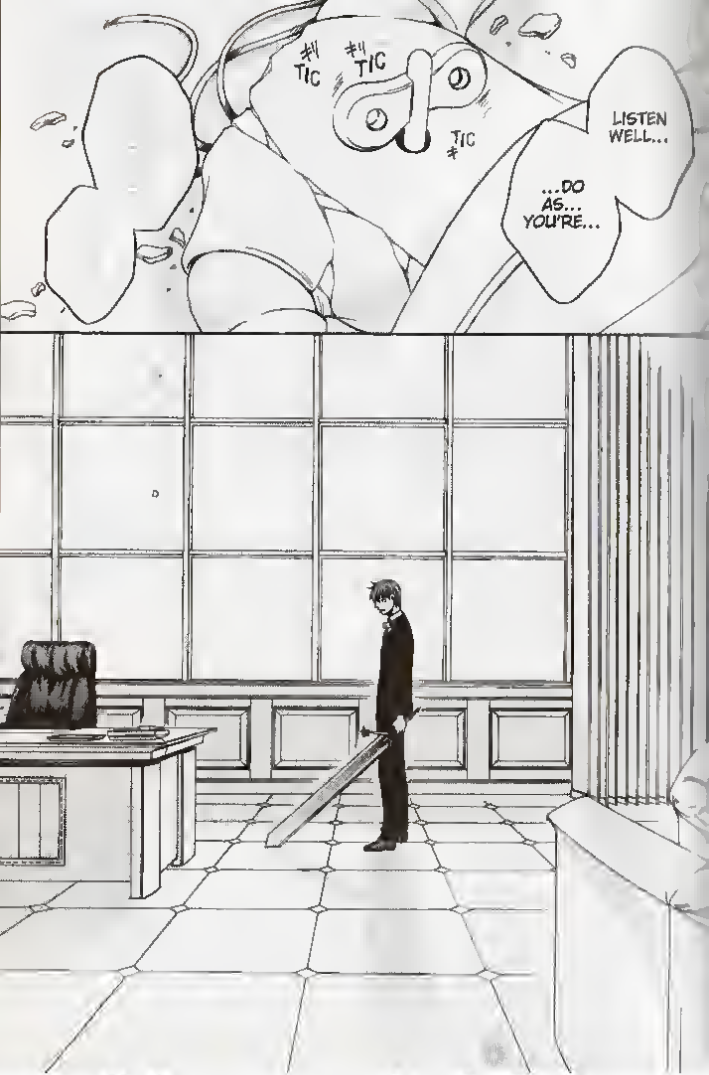

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BUT THE REAL ME WILL NEVER DIE.
IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT, I'LL DO IT.
IT'S ONLY SLEEPING...
...UNTIL THE DAY THIS CAGE STANDS OPEN.
AND WHEN THAT HAPPENS, I'LL LIVE AS I WISH.
BECAUSE LIFE CAN BE A LOT LONGER THAN YOU'D THINK.

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AREN'T YOU GOING TO SAY ANYTHING?
"YOU'RE NOT WHO I THOUGHT YOU WERE," PERHAPS?
OR EVEN "YOU'RE SUCH A COWARD?"
I NEVER LIED TO YOU.
I TOLD YOU I WASN'T THE KIND OF PERSON YOU THOUGHT I WAS
AND IF YOU HAD EVER ASKED ME IF I WAS THE ARMOR-CLAD KNIGHT WHO HAUNTED YOU, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU THE TRUTH.

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AS LONG AS THEY WERE KEEPING ME ENTERTAINED, I COULD FORGET THE LIE I WAS FORCED TO LIVE.
DREAMING WAS JUST A WAY TO PASS THE TIME.
...I DREAMED ALONG WITH YOU.
BUT SINCE YOU WERE SO CERTAIN OF THE TRUTH, SO QUICK TO SEE ME AS SOMEONE ELSE...
BUT I'VE GOTTEN TIRED OF THIS GAME.
THIS IS MY LAST DREAM, SO I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS.
IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO ME, I SUGGEST YOU SAY IT NOW.

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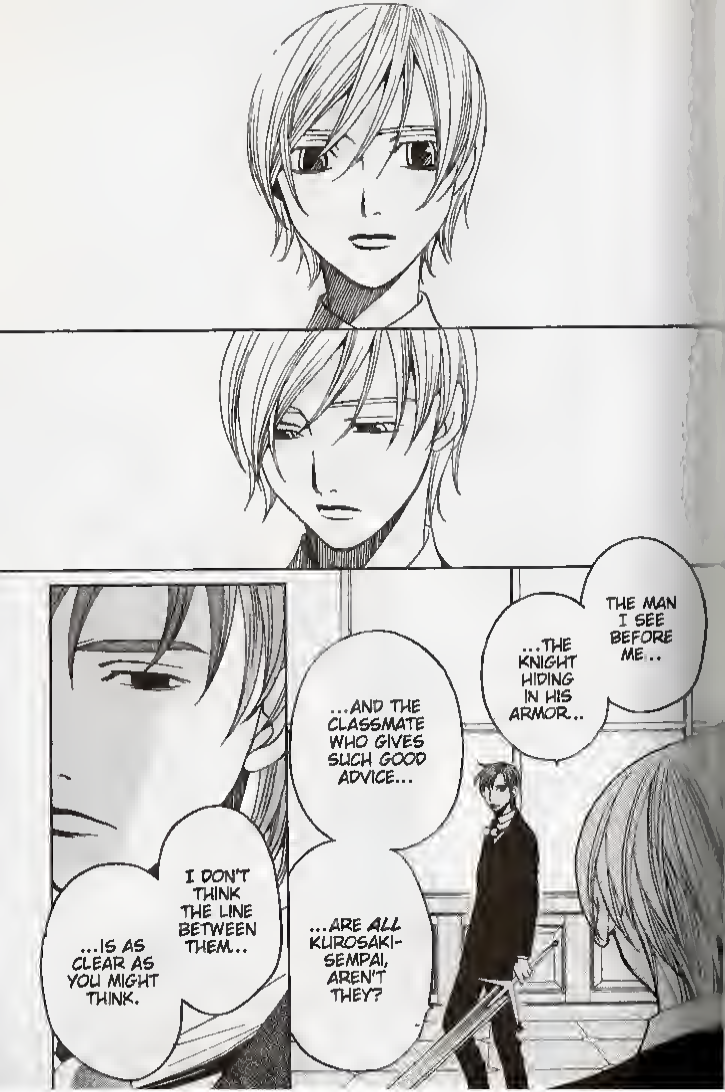
THE MAN I SEE BEFORE ME...
...THE KNIGHT HIDING IN HIS ARMOR..
...AND THE CLASSMATE WHO GIVES SUCH GOOD ADVICE...
...ARE ALL KUROSAKI-SEMPAI, AREN'T THEY?
I DON'T THINK THE LINE BETWEEN THEM...
...IS AS CLEAR AS YOU MIGHT THINK.

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THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT.
PEOPLE HAVE MORE THAN ONE SIDE TO THEM.
...IS SOMEONE I CAN FINALLY UNDERSTAND.
I FEEL LIKE THE MAN I WAS ALWAYS SO IMPRESSED BY...
IN FACT...
IT'S WEIRD FOR ME...
...TO BE SAYING ALL THIS.
.....

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THE OLD ME WOULD HAVE BEEN SHOCKED AND HORRIFIED TO SEE YOU LIKE THIS, AND I PROBABLY WOULD HAVE LASHED OUT.
RIGHT NOW...I'M SURPRISED I'M SO CALM, HONESTLY.
MAYBE I AM IN SHOCK. MAYBE MY MIND JUST WON'T PROCESS IT.
BUT I...

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Chapter 33 / END

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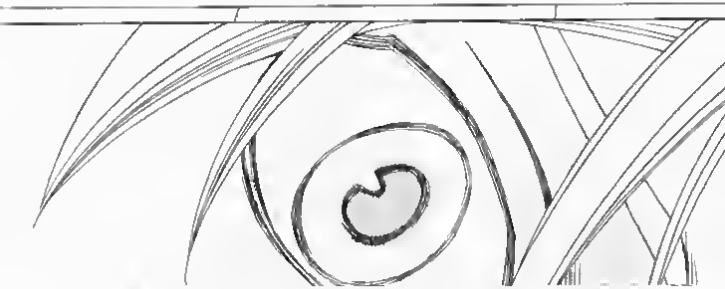

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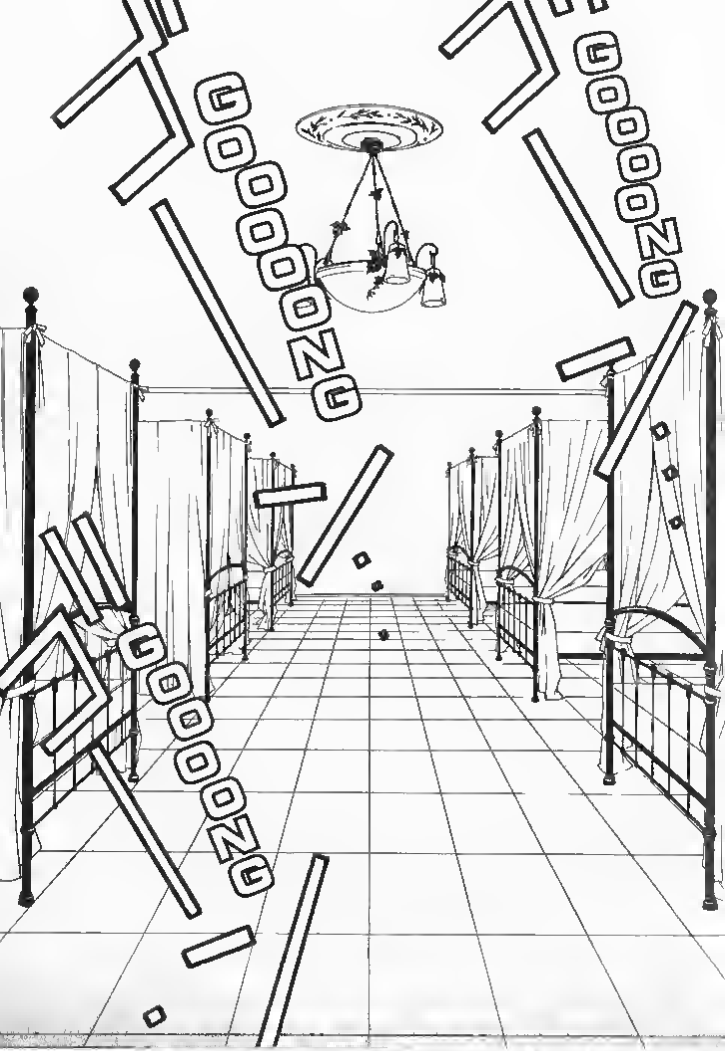

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SOU.
WHY DID YOU LIE ABOUT BEING THE KNIGHT?
WAS IT BECAUSE I ALREADY BELIEVED IT?
IF YOU'D JUST TALKED TO ME, I...
I WOULD HAVE LISTENED.
WHY'RE YOU BRINGING THIS UP?
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
...UH.
AH...
THE KNIGHT... GRADUATED.
MAYBE YOU DIDN'T SEE, BUT THE KNIGHT WAS-
I DIDN'T GO TO CLASS.
I'VE BEEN HERE THE WHOLE TIME.

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IT WAS EASIER FOR ME IF YOU BELIEVED I WAS THE KNIGHT.
IT WAS EVEN BETTER THAN REALITY. THOUGH I GUESS IT WAS HARDER FOR YOU.
ALLOWING YOU TO THINK THAT WAS CONVENIENT FOR ME.
BY BEING THE KNIGHT...
...I COULD SEE HOW READY YOU WERE TO GET INVOLVED WITH ME.
BUT STILL...

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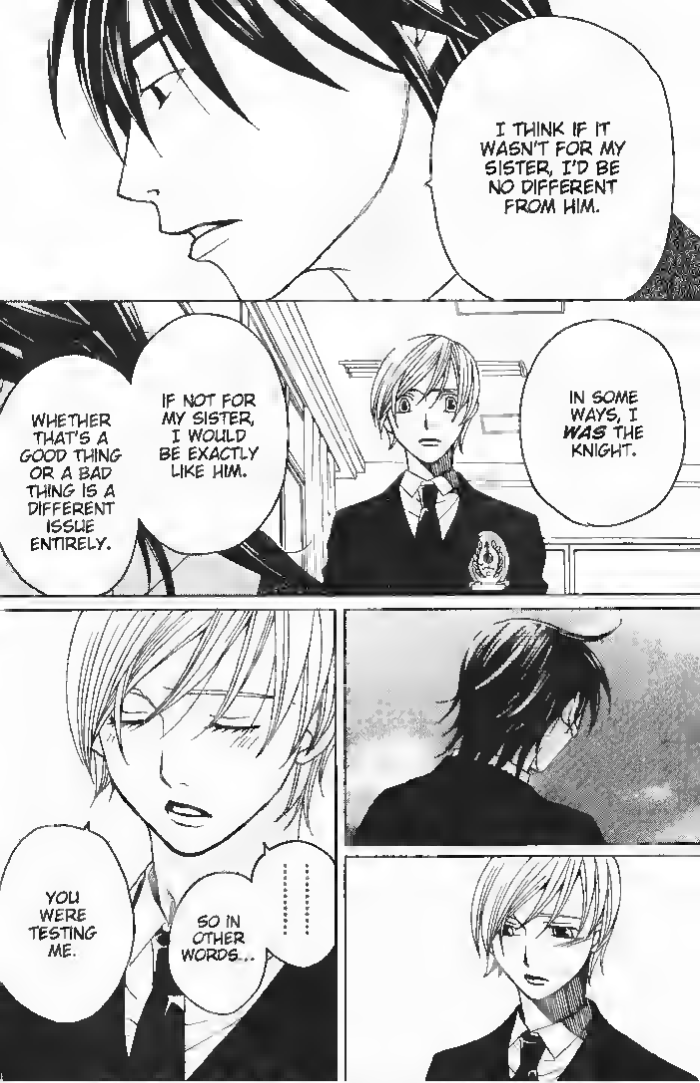
I THINK IF IT WASN'T FOR MY SISTER, I'D BE NO DIFFERENT FROM HIM.
IN SOME WAYS, I *WAS* THE KNIGHT.
IF NOT FOR MY SISTER, I WOULD BE EXACTLY LIKE HIM.
WHETHER THAT'S A GOOD THING OR A BAD THING IS A DIFFERENT ISSUE ENTIRELY.
YOU WERE TESTING ME.
SO IN OTHER WORDS...
.....

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NOW... I'M A LITTLE CONFUSED, BUT I'M NOT MAD THAT YOU LIED TO ME.
I REALLY BELIEVED.
...IT DIDN'T MATTER IF YOU WERE THE KNIGHT.
I'M NOT HOLDING ON TO ANY FANTASIES OR ILLUSIONS ANYMORE.
At least, that's my plan.
SO...
I KNOW NOW THERE'S NO SUCH THING. THAT UNDERNEATH, THEY'RE ALL WEAK AND COWARDLY AND PATHETIC.
EVEN THE ONES WHO SEEM PERFECT, THE ONES WHO SEEM LIKE HEROES...
AS FAR AS GUYS GO...

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HUH?
...NO?
WITH EVERYONE YOU'VE SEEN AND SPOKEN TO, YOU DON'T BELIEVE ONE OF THEM COULD HAVE ALREADY DIED?
WHY DO YOU SAY NO?
YOU'RE NOT THE TYPE TO SEE GHOSTS.
WHO'M I KIDDING?
WE VIEW THINGS THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES.
WE LIVE ON DIFFERENT PLANETS.
YOU AND I SEE DIFFERENT WORLDS.

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I'VE SEEN THEM EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE.
MAYBE NOT GHOSTS... IT'S SOMETHING DIFFERENT.
I'M SURE ANYONE ELSE WOULD CALL IT A GHOST.
BUT TO ME, IT'S NOT THE SAME THING.
LET ME TELL YOU HOW IT ALL STARTED.
IT WAS AFTER MY PARENTS DIVORCED.
I CAUGHT A COLD, AND MY MOTHER WASN'T HOME.
MY FEVER SUDDENLY GOT WORSE, AND SINCE I WAS SO YOUNG...
YOUR SISTER TOLD ME.
YOU CAUGHT PNEUMONIA AND NEARLY DIED.
YOU WENT LOOKING FOR YOUR SISTER, AND SHE SAVED YOU. RIGHT?
THAT'S RIGHT.
MY SISTER WAS ALL I HAD LEFT.

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SISTER WILL SAVE ME.
SHE'S ALWAYS WAITING FOR ME.
IF I CAN GET TO HER, SHE'LL HUG ME AND MAKE EVERYTHING OKAY.
SHE'S ALWAYS HOLDING ONTO THAT BEAR...
...THINKING ABOUT ME.
SISTER LOVES YOU BEST, SOU!
I'LL ALWAYS THINK OF YOU, SOU...

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RUSTLE
LOOK, DADDY!
MOMMY BOUGHT HIM FOR ME!
DID YOU SAY THANK YOU TO YOUR MOTHER?
WHAT A WONDERFUL GIFT, AI!
WELL, ISN'T HE CUTE? YOU TWO ARE A PERFECT MATCH.

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MY SISTER HAD STARTED A NEW LIFE.
SHE SMILED HAPPILY FOR HER NEW MOTHER.
I HAD NO PLACE IN THAT WORLD.
...BUT A LITTLE WHITE PUPPY.
AND WHAT SHE HELD IN HER ARMS WASN'T THE TEDDY BEAR.
MY SISTER WASN'T WAITING FOR ME. SHE NEVER HAD BEEN.

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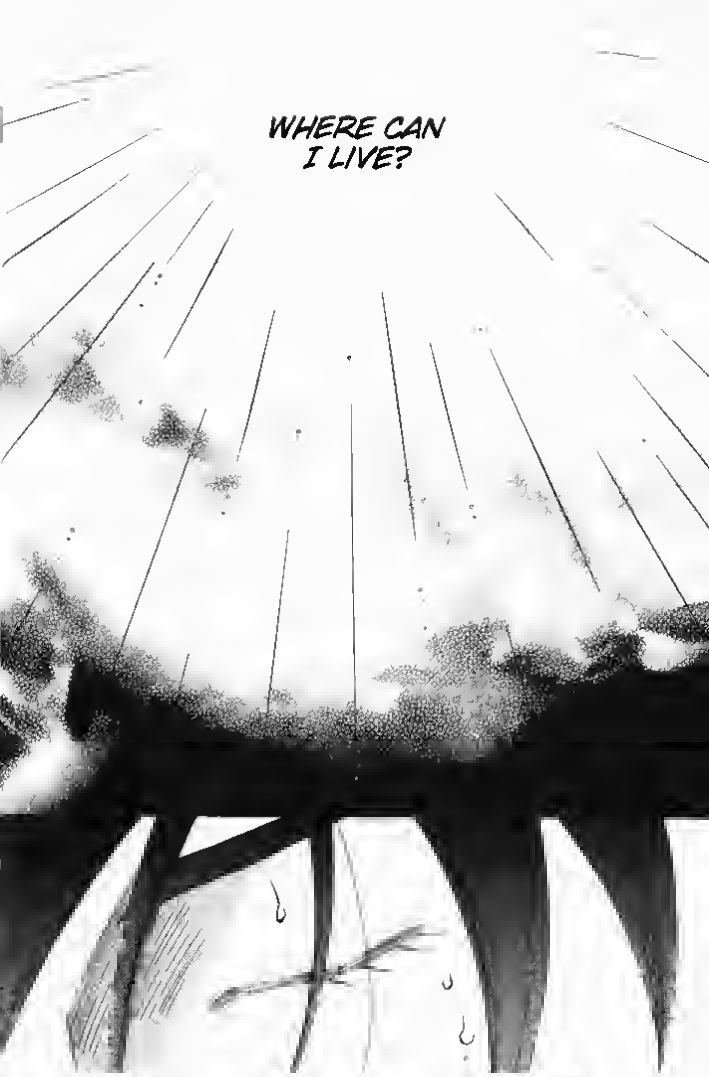

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I'LL SAVE YOU.
LET'S GO.
COME ON, YOU CAN MAKE IT.
I'LL HELP YOU WALK.
THERE'S A POLICE STATION RIGHT OVER HERE.
WHEN I WOKE UP, I WAS IN THE HOSPITAL.
I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT.

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...I WAS WONDERING IF YOU WANTED TO COME. I REALLY-
NO.
I HAVE A PIANO RECITAL NEXT SUNDAY, AND...
SOU?
HI! HOW ARE YOU?
DON'T CALL ME. I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
BUT-
WE LIVE IN DIFFERENT WORLDS, NOW.
WHAT?
CLICK

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SHE WAS ALWAYS WITH ME. WE COULD TALK ABOUT ANYTHING. WE HAD SO MUCH FUN.
WE GREW UP TOGETHER
FROM THAT MOMENT ON, MY SISTER AND I WERE INSEPARABLE.
Ha ha ha ha ha!!
What do you see here?
...SHE THOUGHT SOMETHING WAS WRONG AND SENT ME TO A PSYCHOLOGIST.
MOM COULDN'T HEAR HER, SO WHEN SHE SAW ME LISTENING...

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...AND HE DIDN'T FIND ANYTHING WRONG WITH ME.
I JUST SAID WHATEVER MY SISTER TOLD ME TO...
I ASSUMED THAT SOMEDAY I WOULDN'T NEED HER, ANYMORE...
STILL...
AN ILLUSION'S JUST THAT AN ILLUSION
...AND I'D GROW UP LIKE EVERYONE ELSE
I THOUGHT SHE WOULD EVENTUALLY GO AWAY

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BUT INSTEAD OF FADING AWAY...
...SHE JUST SEEMED MORE AND MORE REAL AND STARTED DOING THINGS I NEVER WOULD HAVE IMAGINED.
I KNEW SHE WAS JUST A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION, BUT I HAD NO CONTROL OVER HER.
I THOUGHT IF I COULD FIND SOMEONE ..
...I TRUSTED MORE THAN MY SISTER, SOMEONE WHO LOVED ME MORE THAN MY SISTER...
...THEN I WOULDN'T NEED HER ANYMORE, AND SHE'D LEAVE ME ALONE.

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BUT IF I COULDN'T FIND SOMEONE...
...I KNEW I'D BE STUCK LIKE THIS FOREVER.
THERE WAS A LETTER IN MIZUHASHI'S DESK.
HE LOOKED SO ODD AFTER HE READ IT, I THOUGHT IT WAS FROM YOU, MASHIRO-KUN.
SO I TOOK A PEEK.
AND I SAW THAT...

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SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN HERE.
SHE'S RIGHT HERE.
SHE'S BORED. SHE'S SINGING "MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB."
Mary had a little lamb
Little lamb little lamb
SHE SAYS SHE CAN'T REMEMBER THE FOURTH VERSE.
DOES IT EVEN HAVE A FOURTH VERSE?
Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow
And everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go

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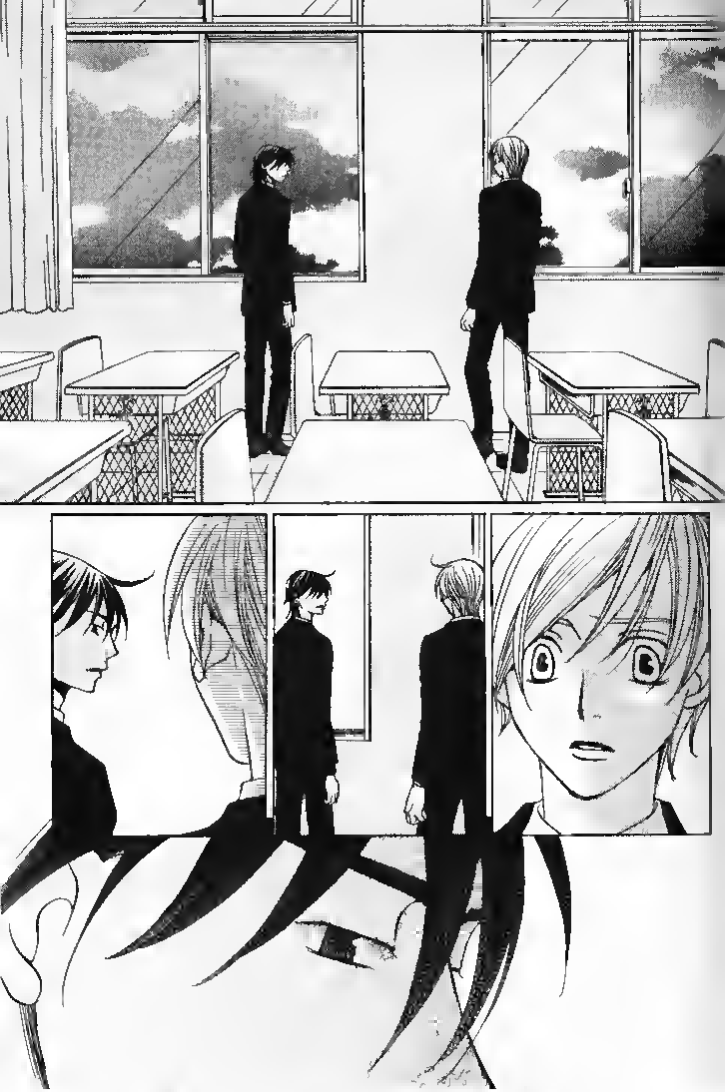

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I DIDN'T THINK I WAS THAT CONVINCING.
I JUST WANTED TO MESS WITH YOU.
YOU CAN'T HONESTLY HAVE BELIEVED ME.
PFFH!
CAN'T YOU TAKE A JOKE? MORON.
SEE YOU.
I'VE MISSED TOO MANY PRACTICES
I'M GOING TO THE DOJO FOR A BIT, AND THEN HEADING HOME.

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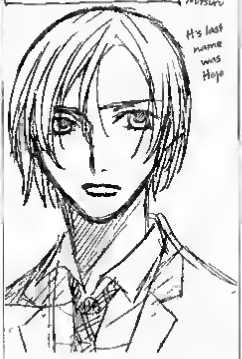
Hey, everyone!
I'm usually so daunted by all this blank space, but this time I know exactly what I want to write about!
I'd like to show you some of the initial character designs for ASN
I've done things like this before, I know, and written about their personalities! But this drawing is way back from '98! It's so old, it's hard for me to look at it
I actually touched it up a little

The hero that would turn out to be Mashiro

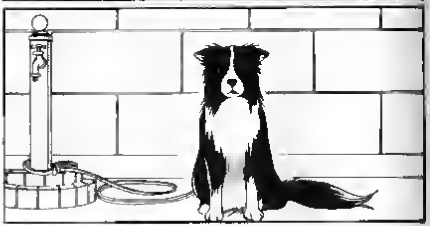
His name was Mitsuru

His last name was Hope



He looks like your completely average high school student, but after he meets the Nurse, he becomes completely unmotivated - He tries to be the cool and clever guy, but sometimes he gets so overwhelmed by feelings that he loses control.

- Is how it goes, folks! He was going to be a lot more mature and cool-headed than the Mashiro we know today Personally, I like this character more, but I guess he really wouldn't have been right for the lead character in a shojo manga



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A JOKE, HE SAYS.
I KNOW THAT'S NOT TRUE.
HE WOULDN'T LIE IN THAT MUCH DETAIL.
EVEN THOUGH...
...THERE WAS SO MUCH MORE I WANTED TO ASK HIM...
I...

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I WONDER WHAT I LOOKED LIKE TO HIM...
SIS, LET ME GO!
I DON'T WANT THIS!!
YOU DON'T WANT THIS?
IF YOU REALLY DIDN'T WANT THIS...
I WOULDN'T BE HERE.
YOU STILL HAVEN'T COME TO TERMS WITH REALITY?
SIXTEEN YEARS, AND YOU STILL HAVEN'T FOUND ANYONE.

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NO!!
COME WITH ME. I'LL MAKE ALL THE PAIN GO AWAY.
A DOG, MAYBE?
IF YOU COULD BE REBORN WHAT WOULD YOU WANT TO BE?
...AND HOLD YOU LIKE THAT.
...SOMEONE WOULD TAKE YOU IN...
PERHAPS IF YOU GOT LOST AGAIN...
AFTER ALL, YOU'D HAVE A BETTER CHANCE AS A DOG.

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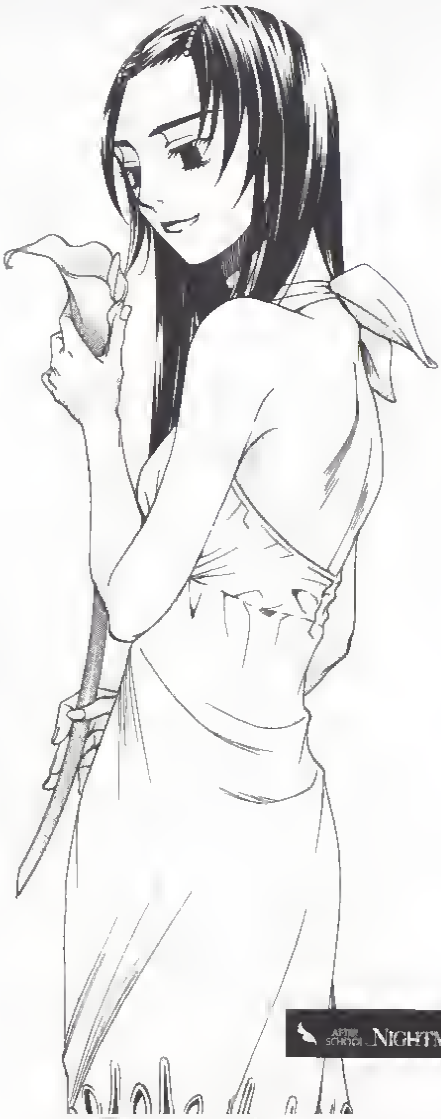

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SHOW MY TRUE SELF...
...BY WEARING THE FORM IN MY HEART?
I CAN'T LET ANYONE SEE THAT.
AND I CERTAINLY CAN'T FIGHT WITH EVERYONE LOOKING...

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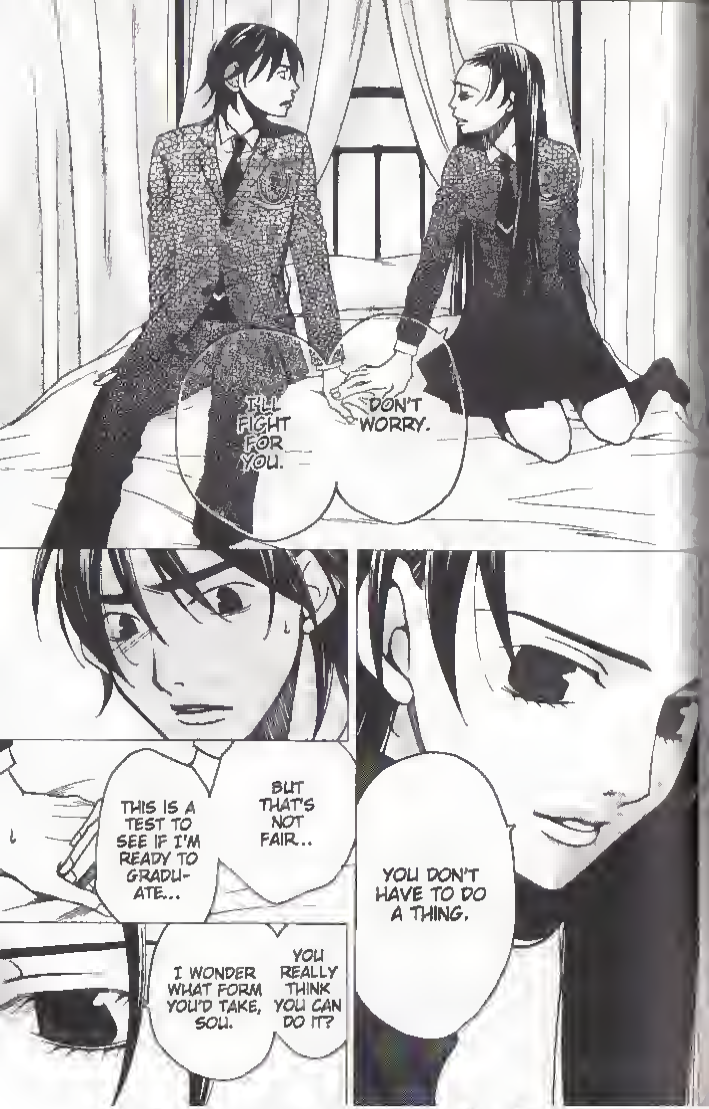
I'LL FIGHT FOR YOU.
DON'T WORRY.
THIS IS A TEST TO SEE IF I'M READY TO GRADU-ATE...
BUT THAT'S NOT FAIR..
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO A THING.
I WONDER WHAT FORM YOU'D TAKE, SOU.
YOU REALLY THINK YOU CAN DO IT?

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COULD YOU REALLY STAND HAVING EVERYONE SEE YOU LIKE THAT?
AN OLD STUFFED BEAR, ALL TATTERED AND TORN?
EY'LL L BE GOING ROUGH E SAME THING, SO WHY LDN'T I...?
BUT EVERYONE ELSE WILL FIGHT FOR THEMSELVES...
WOULDN'T THAT *BE* THE REAL YOU?

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YOU ALREADY GO THROUGH LIFE DREAMING. HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT?
YOU WATCH EVERYONE ELSE STRUGGLE WITH REAL LIFE WHILE YOU LET ME PROTECT YOU FROM IT.
YOU HIDE BEHIND THE MEMORY OF AN IDEAL SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO FACE REALITY.
WHAT IS IT YOU WANT? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO OVERCOME?
AND ANYWAY...

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...LIVE IN A WORLD LIKE THAT!
I CAN'T LET YOU...
DO YOU WANT ME TO DISAPPEAR?
DO YOU REALLY WANT TO LIVE IN A WORLD WITHOUT YOUR BEST FRIEND?
IF YOU GRADUATE, YOU'LL HAVE TO LEAVE ME. DON'T YOU SEE!?

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YOU JUST SLEEP.
THINK ABOUT EVERYTHING YOU HATE ABOUT YOURSELF...
...AND KEEP AN EYE ON THE DREAM.
YOU AND THIS GHOST...
... WILL NEVER HAVE TO PART

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WHEN I HEARD SOMEONE HAD FALLEN...
THAT IT WAS YOU, I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT!
OH, THANK GOD!
THANK GOD YOU WEREN'T BADLY HURT!
ICHIJO.
HOW...?
HOW DID THIS HAPPEN!?
DIDN'T SHE!?
YOUR SISTER DID THIS TO YOU, DIDN'T SHE!?

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ISN'T SHE THE ONE WHO SAVED YOUR LIFE!?
HOW COULD SHE...?
I WON'T FORGIVE HER!!
SHE...
...WASN'T TRYING TO HURT ME.
I'M SURE SHE KNEW IT WOULDN'T KILL ME.
SHE KNEW WE WEREN'T THAT HIGH, THAT THE BUSHES WOULD BREAK MY FALL...

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...DOESN'T MAKE IT OKAY!
JUST BECAUSE YOU LIVED THROUGH IT...
IT'S THE SAME THING!!
SHE WAS AFRAID I'D SEND HER AWAY...
SHE WAS MAD AT ME...
SHE SAW ONE OF THE NOTES...
EVEN KUREHA IS WORRIED ABOUT YOU!
DIDN'T YOU WANT HER TO DISAPPEAR!?
SNAP OUT OF IT!!

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OH, THAT.
SHE AND I HAVE PLAYED THAT GAME...
...EVER SINCE THE DAY SHE SAVED ME
I'D LEAVE PAPER OUT FOR HER...
Mommy, sleepyhead! It's beautiful outside. Come have breakfast and then we'll take a walk.
...AND SHE'D WRITE NOTES FOR ME.
THEY MADE ME SO HAPPY.
AFTER A WHILE, IT JUST BECAME A HABIT.
IT'S HARD TO BREAK, EVEN NOW.

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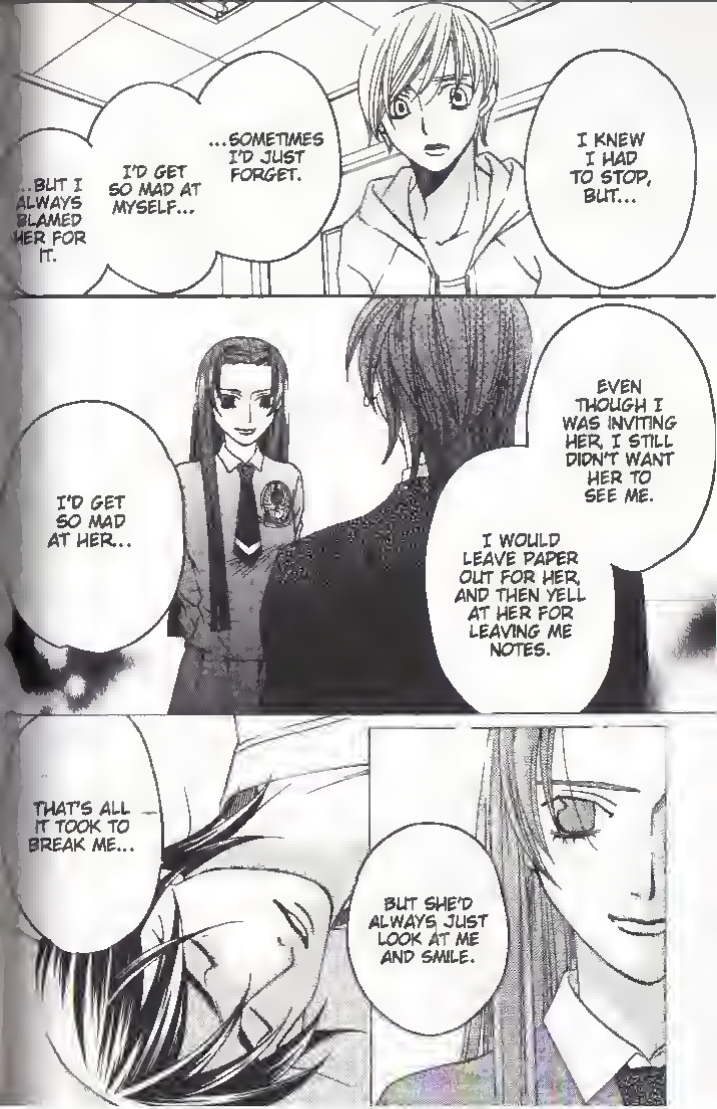
I KNEW I HAD TO STOP, BUT...
...SOMETIMES I'D JUST FORGET.
I'D GET SO MAD AT MYSELF...
...BUT I ALWAYS BLAMED HER FOR IT.
EVEN THOUGH I WAS INVITING HER, I STILL DIDN'T WANT HER TO SEE ME.
I WOULD LEAVE PAPER OUT FOR HER, AND THEN YELL AT HER FOR LEAVING ME NOTES.
I'D GET SO MAD AT HER...
BUT SHE'D ALWAYS JUST LOOK AT ME AND SMILE.
THAT'S ALL IT TOOK TO BREAK ME...

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I'VE LIVED LIKE THIS FOR OVER TEN YEARS, NOW.
EVEN THOUGH I KNOW IT'S ALL A LIE...
...IT'S A LIE THAT LETS ME KEEP LIVING.
MY SISTER HASN'T DONE ANYTHING WRONG.
NONE OF THIS IS HER FAULT.
IT'S MINE, FOR CLINGING TO A MEMORY.
I'M THE ONE WHO WITHDREW FROM LIFE.

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I'VE BEEN BETRAYED MORE TIMES THAN I CAN COUNT, BUT...
...INSTEAD OF LETTING MYSELF GET ANGRY AND THEN FORGIVE AND FORGET...
...I CHOSE THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE, WHERE I'D NEVER HAVE TO FIGHT.
I MADE MY CHOICE THAT FATEFUL DAY.

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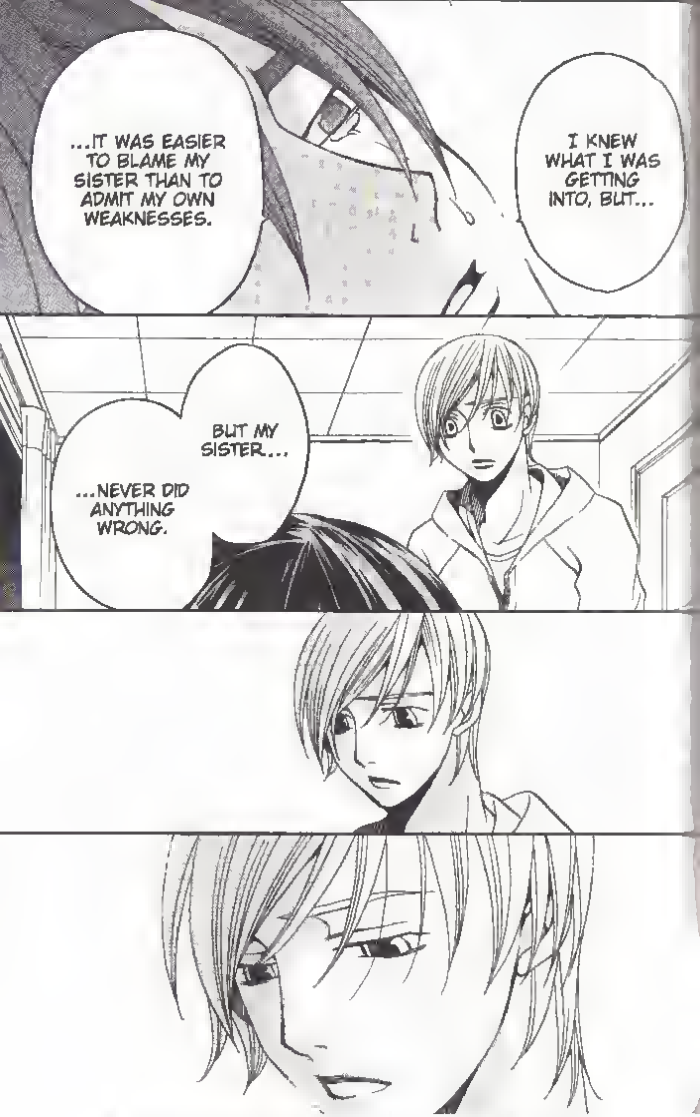
I KNEW WHAT I WAS GETTING INTO, BUT...
...IT WAS EASIER TO BLAME MY SISTER THAN TO ADMIT MY OWN WEAKNESSES.
BUT MY SISTER...
...NEVER DID ANYTHING WRONG.

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...I'LL FIND AI-SAN AND TALK TO HER.
AT THE NEXT CLASS...
I'LL JUST TALK TO HER.
I WON'T BE MAD AT YOUR SISTER.
FINE.
...I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT SHE WOULD DO TO YOU.
I SKIPPED CLASS BECAUSE...
I'VE MISSED TWO WEEKS, NOW.
I HURT ALL OVER, BUT I HAVE TO BE THERE.
WILL YOU BE BETTER BY NEXT WEEK?
WILL YOU BE THERE, SOU?

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WHEN THE BELL TOLLS...

...I WATCH THE DREAM FROM AFAR.

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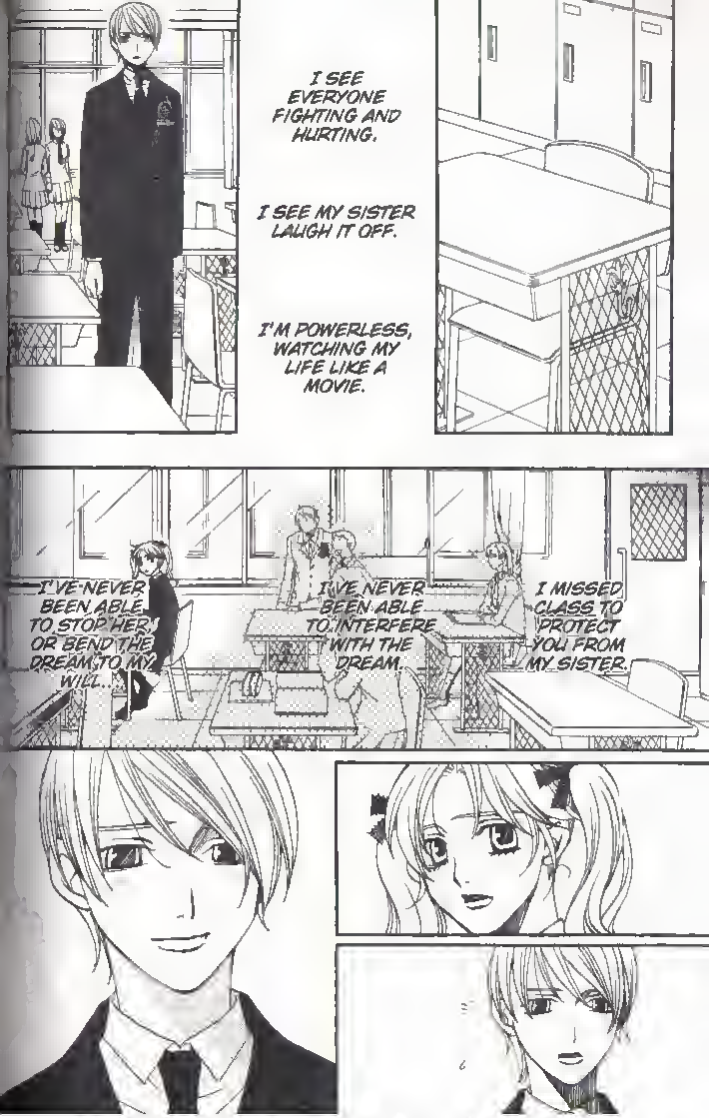
I SEE EVERYONE FIGHTING AND HURTING.
I SEE MY SISTER LAUGH IT OFF.
I'M POWERLESS, WATCHING MY LIFE LIKE A MOVIE.
I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO STOP HER, OR BEND THE DREAM TO MY WILL...
I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO INTERFERE WITH THE DREAM.
I MISSED CLASS TO PROTECT YOU FROM MY SISTER.

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RIGHT NOW.
THAT'S ALL I WANT.
I'D BE HAPPY IF MY BREATH EVEN RUSTLED THE LEAVES...
I WANT TO TOUCH THAT WORLD.
I WANT TO FEEL WHAT THEY DO.

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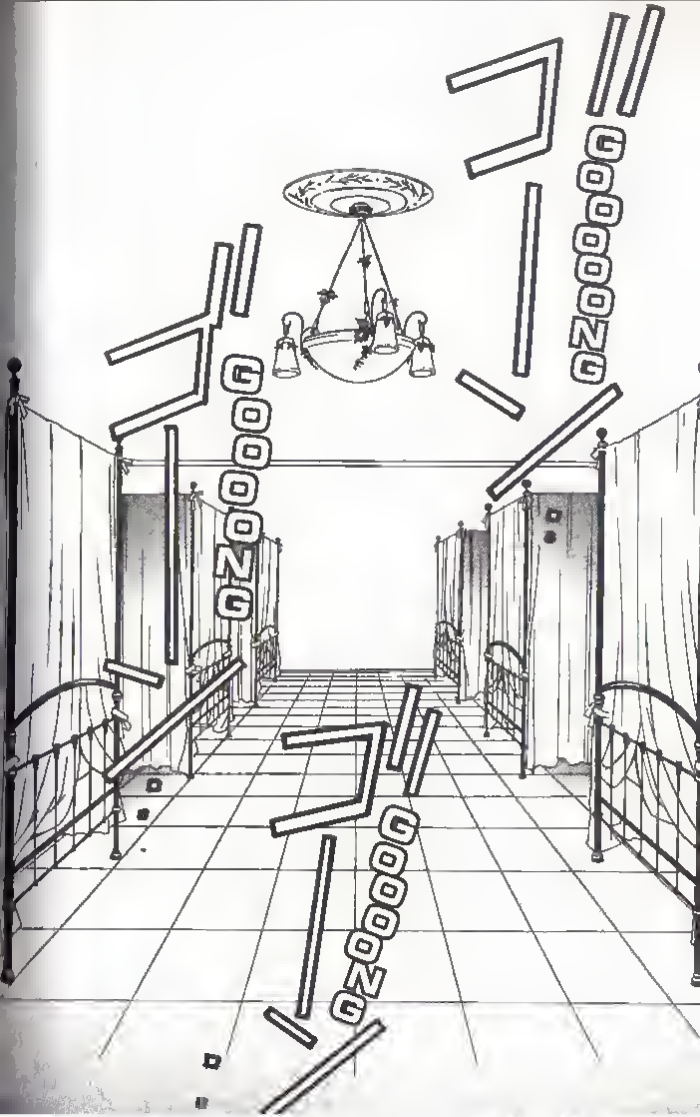

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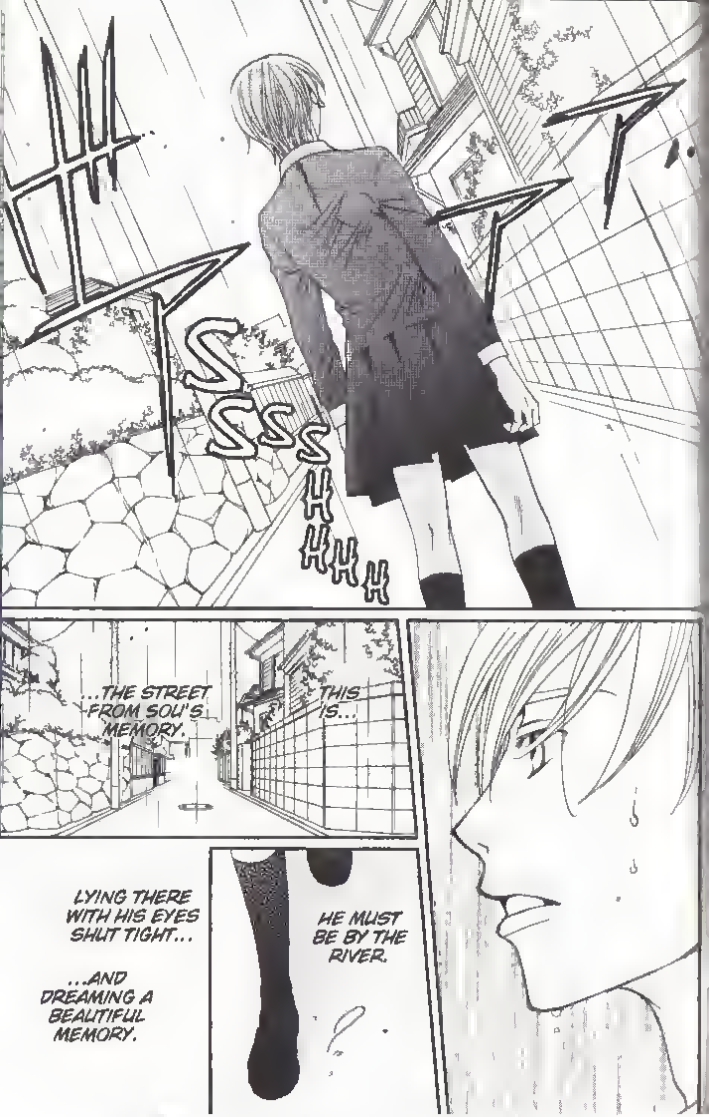
SSSSHHHH
...THE STREET FROM SOU'S MEMORY.
THIS IS...
LYING THERE WITH HIS EYES SHUT TIGHT...
...AND DREAMING A BEAUTIFUL MEMORY.
HE MUST BE BY THE RIVER.

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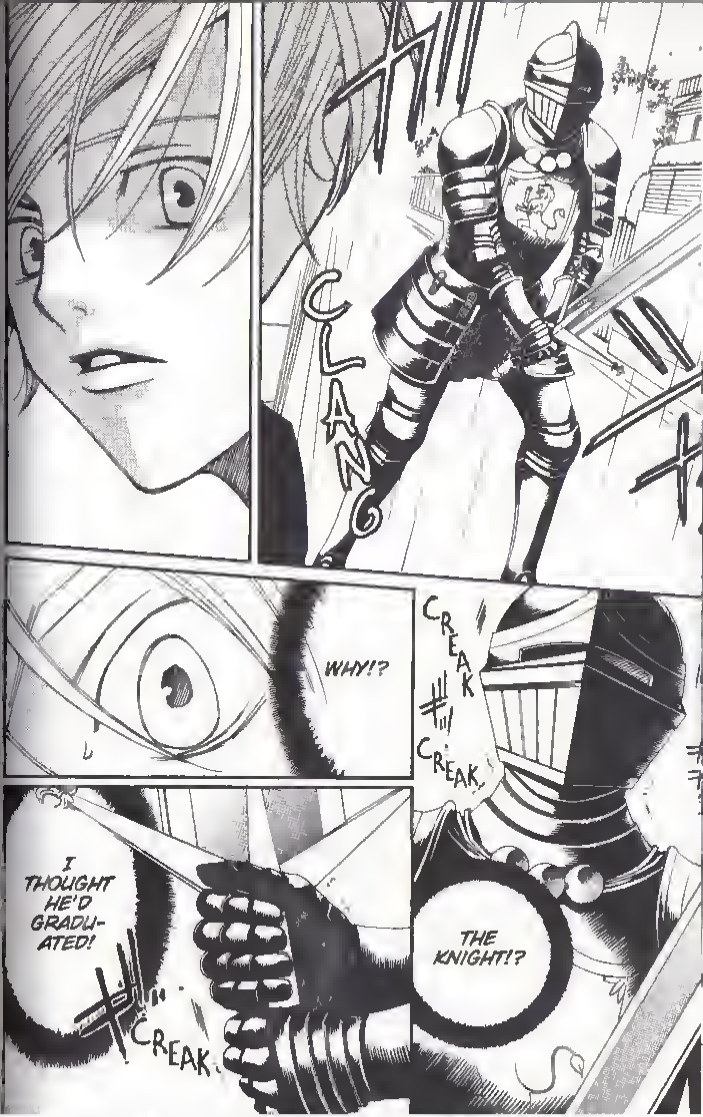

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HE'S... IN THE KENDO CLUB.
RIGHT
THANKS, KUREHA!
SPLIT
WHAT'S YOUR PROB-LEM!?
YOU'RE JUST A CHEAP IMITATION!!
You're making this a bigger deal than it should be
Pathetic
POP
HOW DO YOU GET STRON-GER..
THEN... HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO BECOME ANYTHING?
...WHEN YOU'RE NOTHING TO BEGIN WITH!?
CRUMPLE
IF YOU COULD WIN BY IMITATING SOMEONE ELSE'S STRENGTH, NO ONE WOULD EVER HAVE TO WORK FOR ANYTHING!
You can barely even move!
BUT IF I'M NOT STRONG, I CAN'T WIN..
YOU'RE HOWHERE NEAR WINNING LIKE THIS!
CRAK
CRAK

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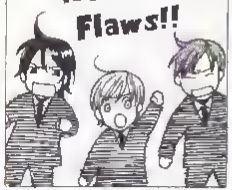
Part II of the Character Designs from the Past

The character who would turn out to be Sou

- He's a high-class, proud, haughty boy
- In the school life, he's an honor student, very socially fluent on the surface, and gentlemanly
- He realizes the hero is a girl immediately
- In the battling world, he's a match above the rest

Is what the description read "Gentlemanly"? Huh, sounds like he was going to end up a lot like Kurosaki-senpai. As for the character who would turn out to be said senpai, he existed, all right. He was a strong, gentle, and accomplished person. For Mashiro, Sou, and the senpai, it looks like I was going to have them all be pretty flawless characters. So how did they turn out so messed up ?



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YOU THINK HE'LL REALLY BE HAPPIER?
IF YOU TELL HIM TO LOOK DEEP WITHIN HIMSELF...
...AND HE FALLS INTO THE DESPAIR THAT AWAITS, HE'LL HAVE NO WAY OUT.
ARE YOU WILLING TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THAT?
CAN YOU REALLY BE THE ONE...
...TO TAKE MY PLACE AND SHOW SOU ALL HIS LOVELY DREAMS?

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THE PRINCE OF HYPOCRISY, ALWAYS TRYING TO PLAY THE HERO...
YOU STAYED IN SOU'S HEART, EVEN AFTER HURTING AND TORMENTING HIM.
ACTUALLY... I'M WRONG
YOU AREN'T EVEN REAL.
YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING.

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I WANT TO SEE SOU.
AFTER ALL, THAT'S THE ONLY WAY TO GET RID OF ME.
FINE, YOU HAVE TEN SECONDS.
LET'S SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO.
OH, THAT'S RIGHT.
YOU'LL KILL HIM!
AND WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN YOU SEE HIM?
10

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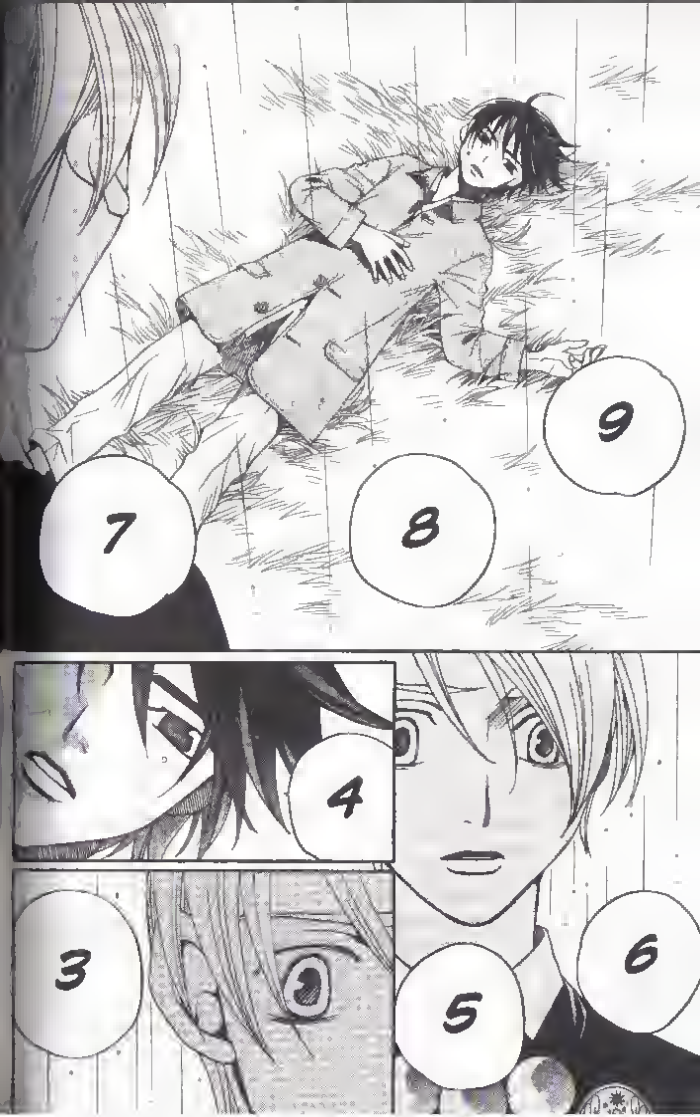

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...IS WHAT SOU WANTED.
THE FORM I TAKE...
I ALWAYS HOLD THE TEDDY BEAR SHE DROPPED.
I AM THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF THE GIRL WHO BETRAYED HIM. THAT'S WHY MY DRESS IS BLACK.
THIS IS A SYMBOL OF MY LOVE FOR SOU.

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MASHIRO KUN.
YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD BE A HERO, BUT YOU DON'T ACTUALLY KNOW WHAT YOU WANT.
SURE, SOU HAS MOMENTS OF DOUBT.
BUT IN THE END, HE KNOWS WHAT HE WANTS.
IF YOU REALLY CARE FOR HIM, DON'T INTERFERE.
DEEP DOWN, HE WANTS ME TO PROTECT HIM.
OH, BUT YOU'RE MISTAKEN.
THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS.
...YOU'RE WRONG.

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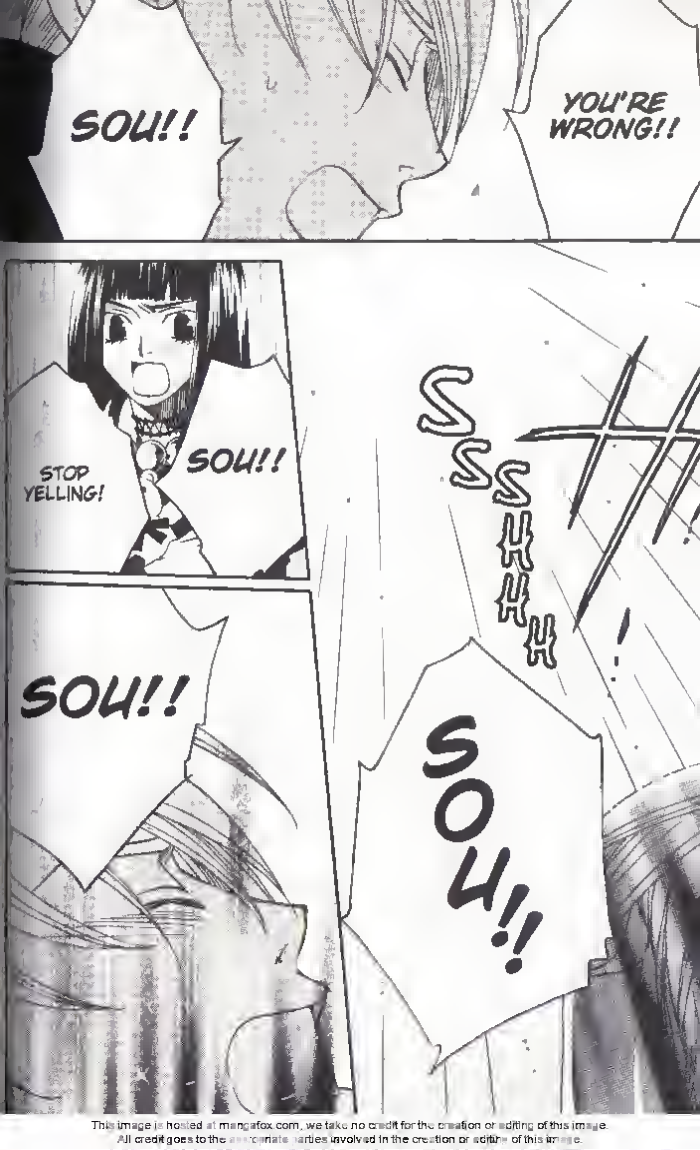

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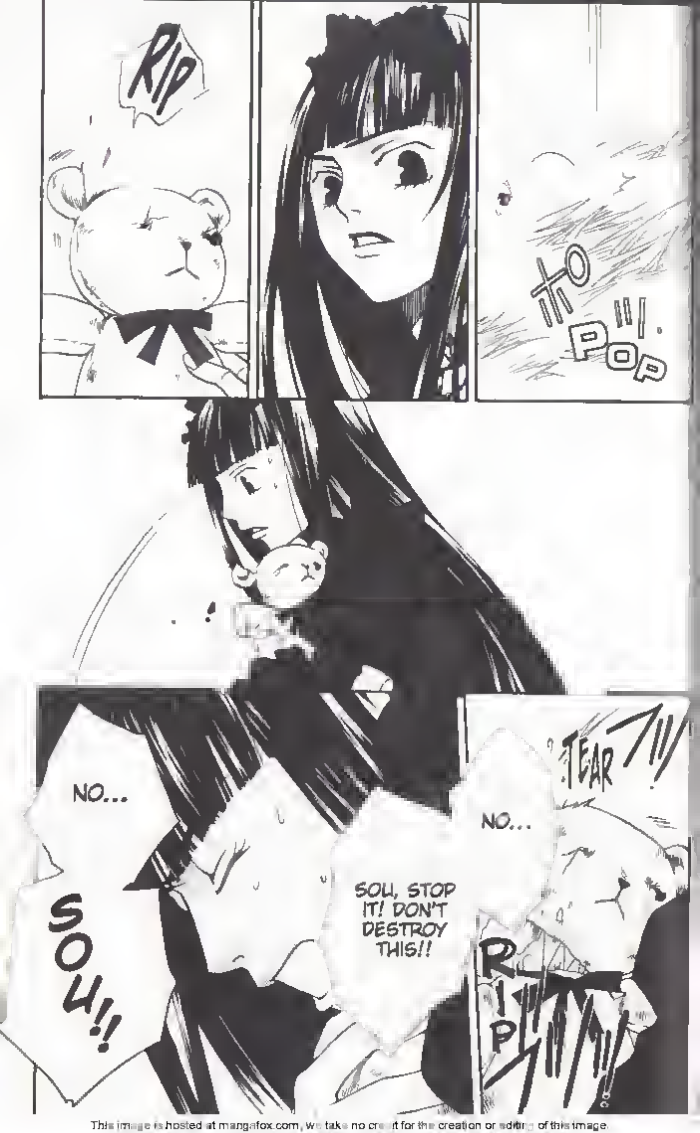

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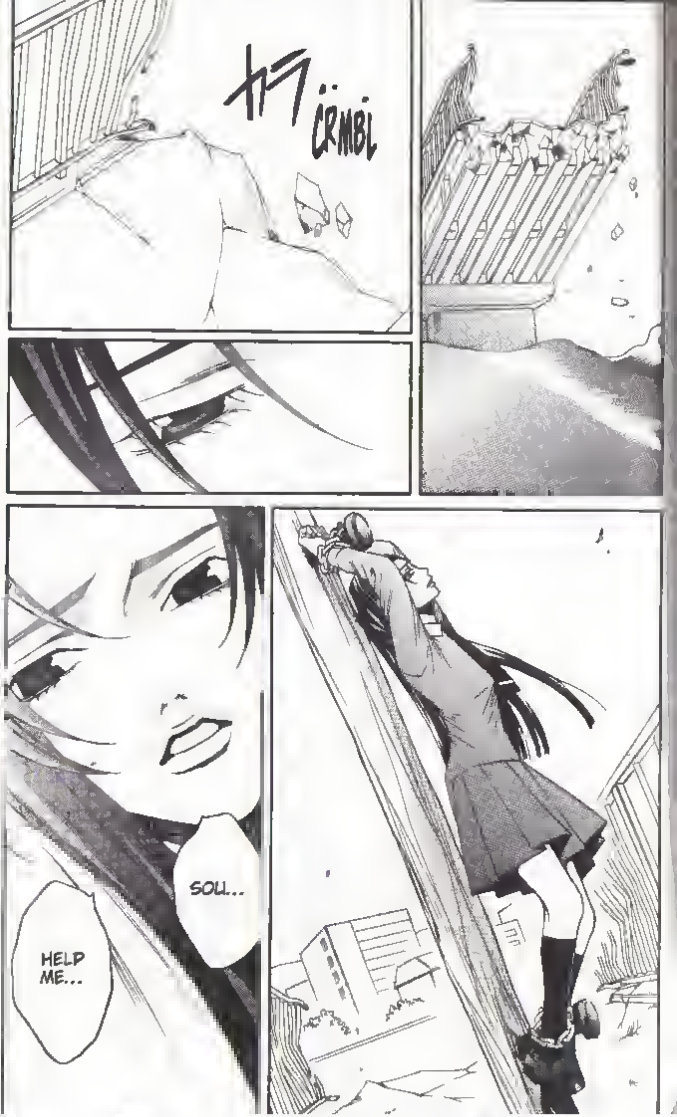

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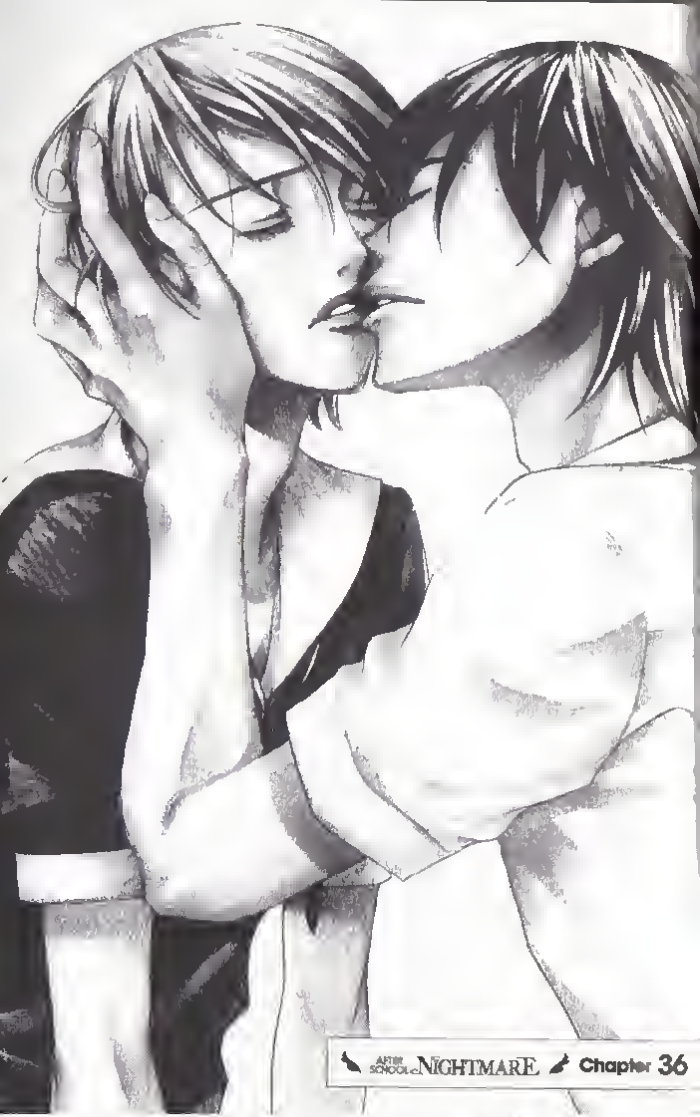

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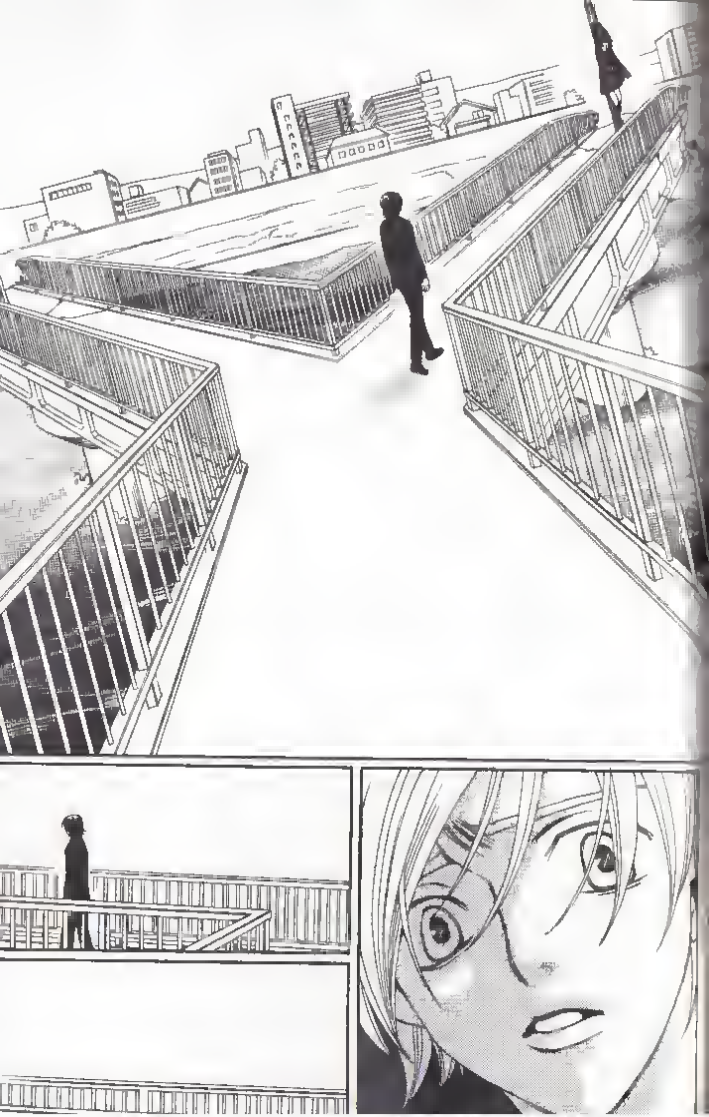

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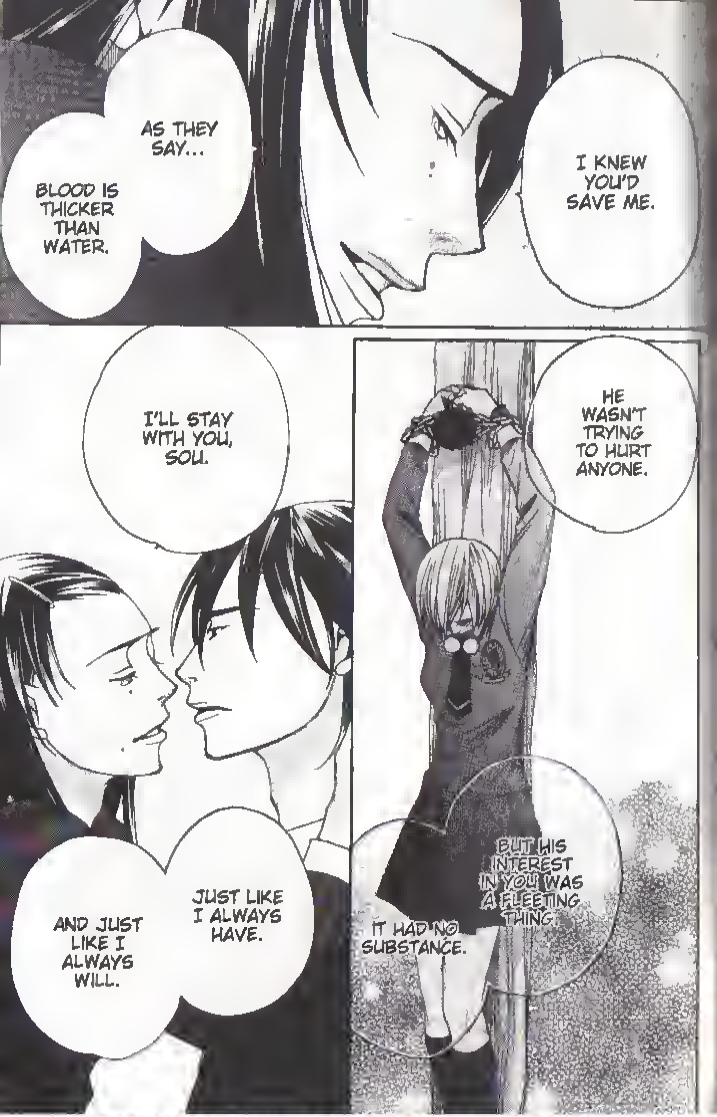
AS THEY SAY...
BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER.
I KNEW YOU'D SAVE ME.
I'LL STAY WITH YOU, SOU.
AND JUST LIKE I ALWAYS WILL.
JUST LIKE I ALWAYS HAVE.
HE WASN'T TRYING TO HURT ANYONE.
BUT HIS INTEREST IN YOU WAS A FLEETING THING.
IT HAD NO SUBSTANCE.

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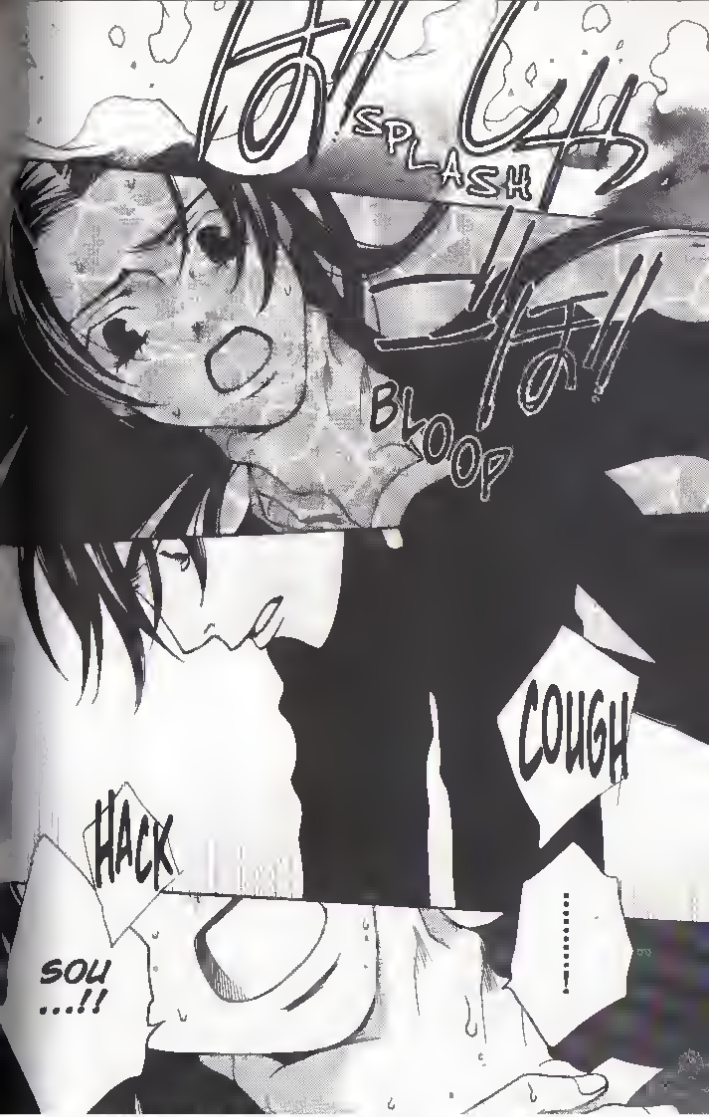

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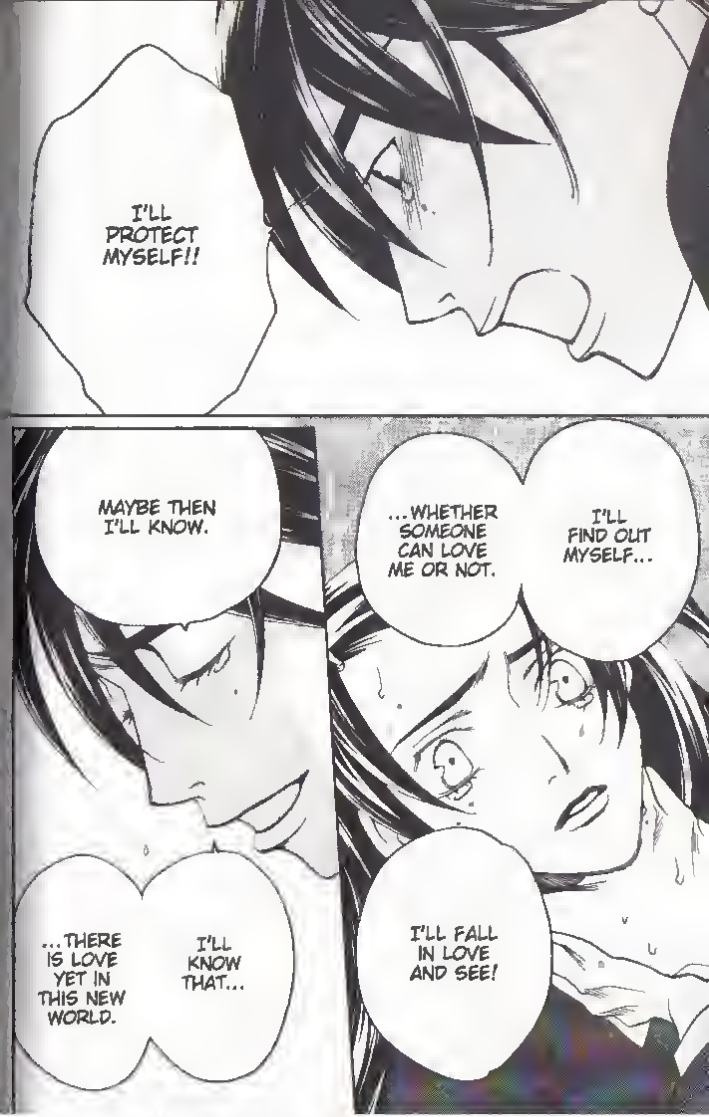
I'LL PROTECT MYSELF!!
MAYBE THEN I'LL KNOW.
...THERE IS LOVE YET IN THIS NEW WORLD.
I'LL KNOW THAT...
...WHETHER SOMEONE CAN LOVE ME OR NOT.
I'LL FIND OUT MYSELF...
I'LL FALL IN LOVE AND SEE!

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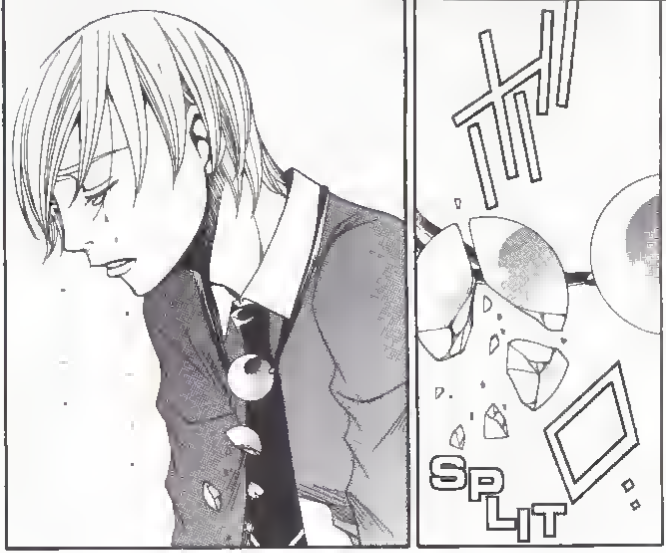
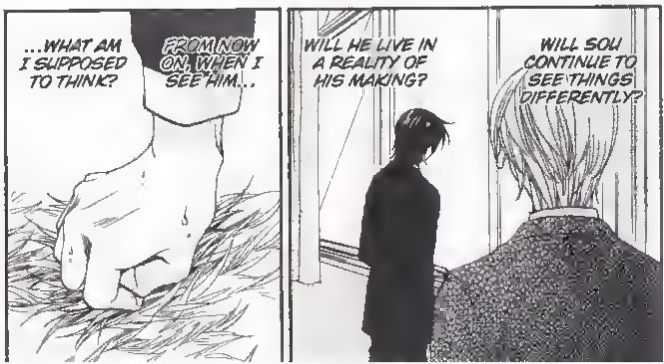


WHAT WILL I DO WITH REALITY?

I WOULD RATHER DREAM.


...WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO THINK?
FROM NOW ON, WHEN I SEE HIM...
WILL HE LIVE IN A REALITY OF HIS MAKING?
WILL SOU CONTINUE TO SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY?

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I HATE THIS.

WHY AM I LIKE THIS?

WHERE DID I GO WRONG?

WILL I ALWAYS BE THIS AIMLESS?

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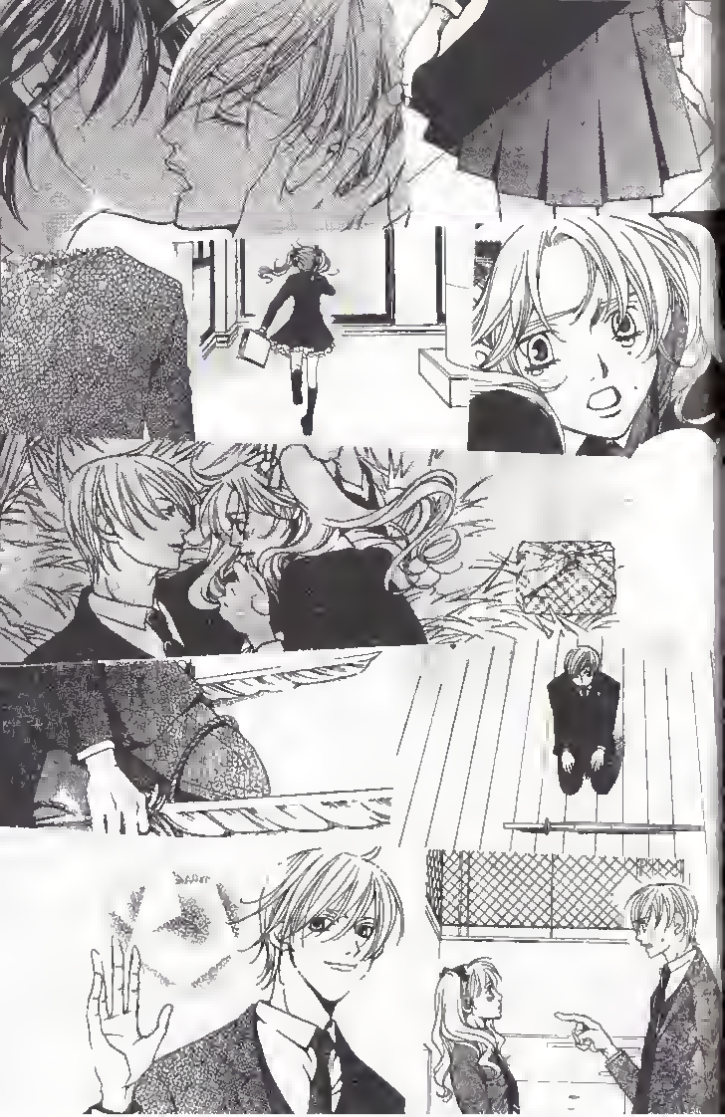

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I'M SO TIRED...

SO TIRED...

SPLISH

FA TO

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Part III of the Character Designs from the Past

Who is this old man?

This is the "Sensei". At this point, I hadn't yet established that there'd be sleeping and fighting in an "infirmary". In fact, I was thinking more along the lines of them entering a capsule and fighting in virtual reality. And this Sensei wouldn't be the nurse from the Nurse's Office, but a scientist!

Also, the title of this work was going to be "J". But I ended up using it for another of my manga that came before ASN that was about badminton. I figured I'd never get the chance to draw the entirety of this story, and "J" seemed like such a good title for the badminton one, so it went to that. This series underwent a lot of changes, but the final form that "After School Nightmare" took was the best it could have ever been. Cuz now you can more easily call it "ASN"!

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AI... DIED...
SHE HAD A HEADACHE ALL LAST NIGHT...
THE DOCTOR SAID IT WAS JUST A COLD, BUT...
SHE...
BUT WE DIDN'T REALIZE IT WAS A HEMORRHAGE...
SHE JUST PASSED AWAY...

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I FORGIVE YOU, TOO.
I'M SURE AI FORGAVE YOU.
AI CALLED ME FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS...
... "JUST TO TALK", SHE SAID.
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT...
...IT MUST'VE BEEN A SIGN.

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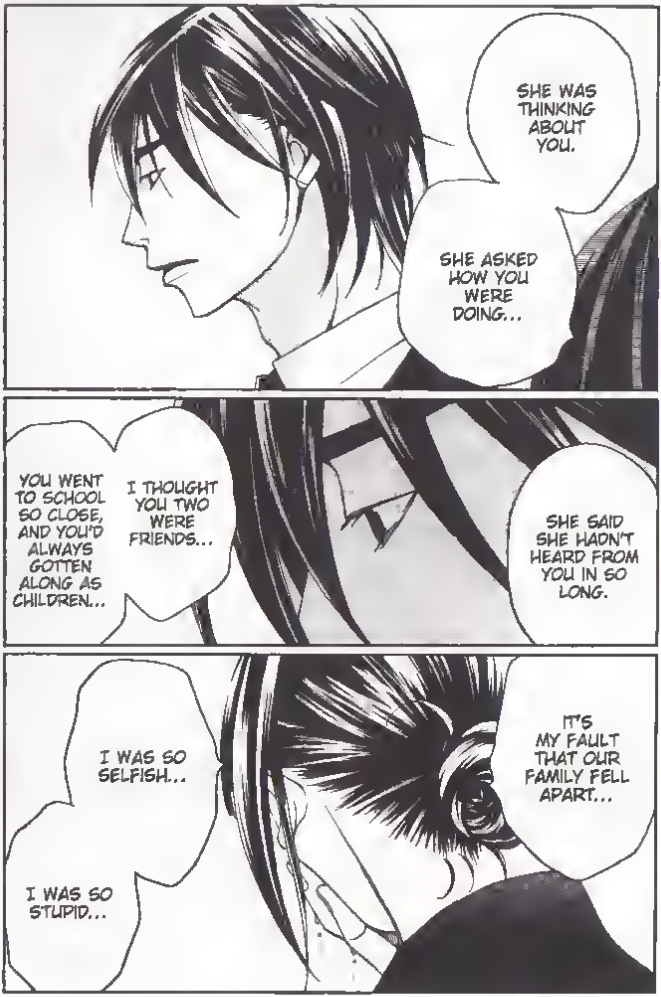
SHE WAS THINKING ABOUT YOU.
SHE ASKED HOW YOU WERE DOING...
YOU WENT TO SCHOOL SO CLOSE, AND YOU'D ALWAYS GOTTEN ALONG AS CHILDREN...
I THOUGHT YOU TWO WERE FRIENDS...
SHE SAID SHE HADN'T HEARD FROM YOU IN SO LONG.
I WAS SO SELFISH...
I WAS SO STUPID...
IT'S MY FAULT THAT OUR FAMILY FELL APART...

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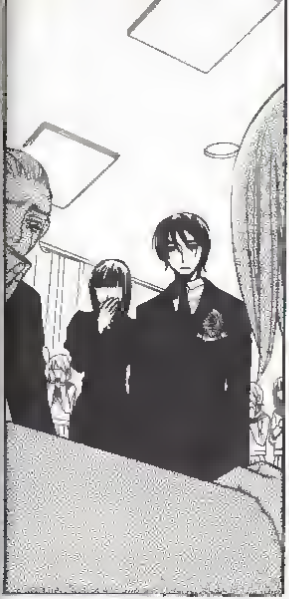
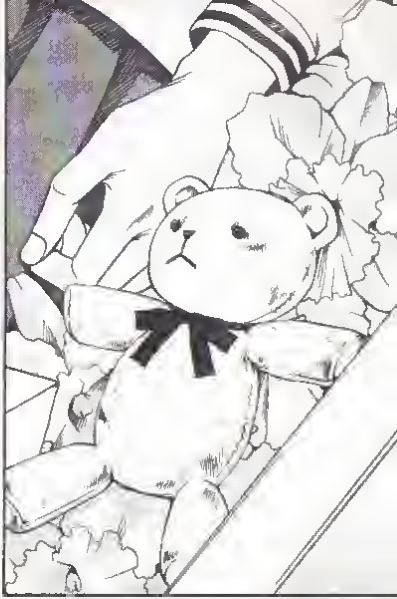
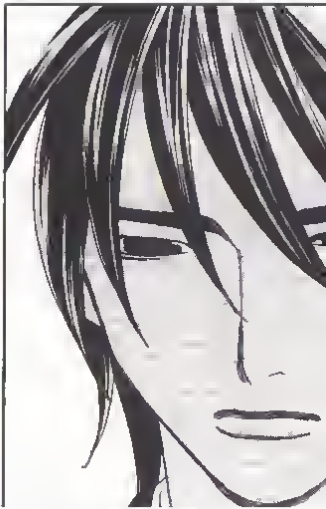




I DON'T THINK...

...MY SISTER EVER REALLY BETRAYED ME.



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SHE WAS ONLY TWO YEARS OLDER THAN ME. STILL JUST A CHILD, TOO.
IT WAS MY FAULT FOR EXPECTING SO MUCH.
I WANTED MORE THAN SHE COULD GIVE.

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WHO KNOWS...

...HOW MANY MORE TIMES AFTER THIS...

BUT WHEN IT HAPPENS, I HAVE TO BREATHE THROUGH THE PAIN...

...AND FORGIVE WITH A SMILE.

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I DIDN'T KNOW YOU TWO WERE CLOSE.
ICHIJO-SAN CALLED MY NAME, SO I WAS A LITTLE CONFUSED...
NOTH-ING...IT'S JUST...
WHAT'S THE MAT-TER?
WE'RE NOT.
WE'VE NEVER EVEN TALKED BEFORE...
THEY'LL RUN OUT OF THE SPECIAL IF WE DON'T HURRY!
MASHIRO, LET'S GO TO LUNCH!

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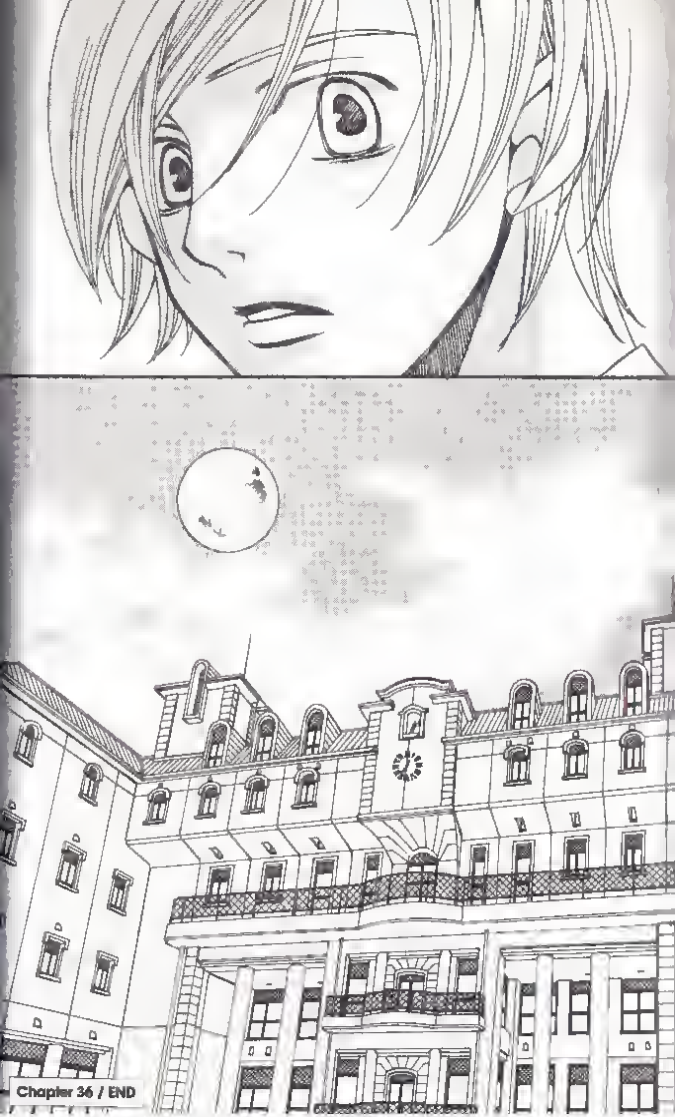

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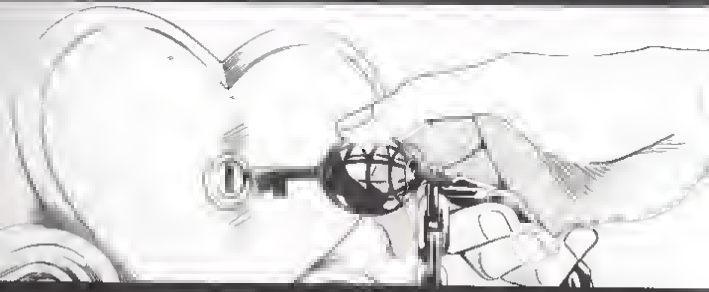
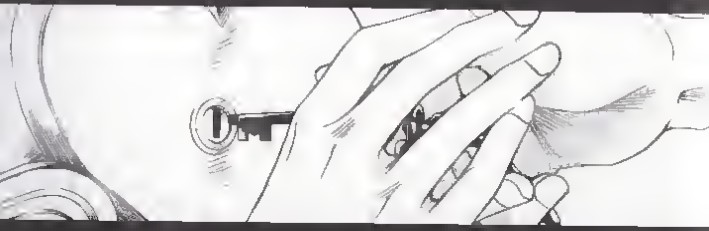
The nightmare ends...



...Or does it?



In The Final Volume of
AFTER SCHOOL NIGHTMARE

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